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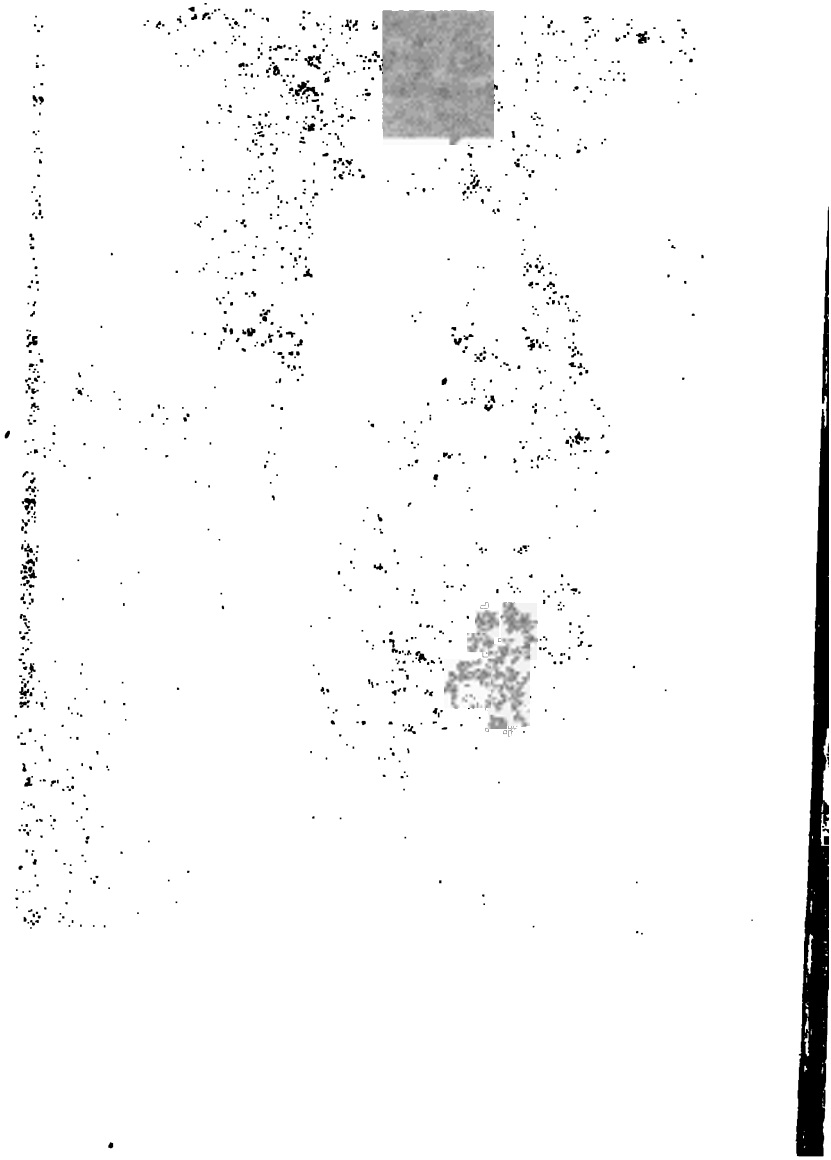

THE WAGES OF HONOR

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

KATHARINE HOLLAND BROWN

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1917

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⁂ The stories in this volume first appeared in Scribner's Magazine, with the exception of "Briarley's Real Woman" and "Billy Foster and the Snow Queen", for which acknowledgments are due to the Hearst Publishing Company and to the Woman's Home Companion.

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THE WAGES OF HONOR

THE WAGES OF HONOR

JUNE sunlight, dimmed to silver by drifting morning haze, lay broad on the great campus, and chequered the flagged Elm Walk with flickering arabesque of twig and leaf. The thick young grass was still fleeced gray with heavy dew; the banners and bunting which draped the gaunt college doorways, and wreathed the flamboyant arches, that rose at intersecting paths along the Seniors' line of march, hung moveless in the warm, sweet air. The day above was calm as sleep. Yet through it swung a great quickening pulse of expectation. This fragrant morning silence, with its green peaceful vistas, its blue unfathomed depths of sky, seemed merely the background, admirably planned, set with wise thought and fine unswerving skill, for the climax of some gracious play; for the last act of the long college year.

The President viewed its beauty placidly as he stepped from his decorous threshold and walked down his shaded garden, then across to the Old Main Portico. Already the broad green spaces were filling with an eager crowd. It was not yet nine o'clock; yet there must be five or six thousand people on the grounds, he considered. Another hour, and the

great lawns would be a living flood. He narrowed his tired old eyes against the sunlight, and reflected. There had been barely five hundred in the audience at his first commencement in this college, thirty-six years ago. And five hundred had seemed a majestic assemblage in those days. However, thirty-six years was a good while back; a long while.

From the top step of Main Portico, the point of outlook deferentially accorded him, he could look across the campus, east, north, south, to the three great groups of departmental buildings: medicine; engineering; law. Their lank walls, too raw and new for the sheathing ivy which softened Old Main, flaunted gay with flags and college colors; their broad steps, and the oval plots below, were crowded with Seniors in cap and gown, already falling into irregular frolicking line. From the Library front rose suddenly the clamor and thump of the favorite college quickstep, played by the college band. The students joined in, with uproarious vim. Even the President caught himself humming the jubilant air. Then he checked himself, and turned with grave official courtesy to meet the first detachment of his colleagues, who, in unwonted and perspiring pomp of mortar-boards and doctor's hoods, were taking their stand on the steps around him.

"Fine clear day for the Seniors, isn't it?" The Dean of the School of Mines nodded to the President, smiling. His handsome cordial face was flushed and beaded from his rapid walk; his deep voice rang with

a sonorous mellowed note. "Though for my part I can't remember a Commencement Day that wasn't clear—and hot, too; hot as blazes, 'specially my own." He laughed out, tugging at his billowy exasperating sleeves. "Thirty-one years ago to-day, by Jove! Our class, '86, was the first to reach the hundred mark. How cocky we were, to be sure! And here this year's class grazes the thousand! Remember our class, Doctor?"

The President nodded, absently. He did remember; not only the class, but the boy who, in these thirty-one years, had grown into this bluff recognized authority. A lean, scared, awkward gangling cub, with feet several sizes too big for his lank ankles, with brawny red wrists sprouting from the skimp sleeves of his shiny black coat, with a rough-hewn honest young face, and a voice whose gruff, shy tones already held the note of steadfast dominant purpose which had ruled all his staunch useful years. Certainly he remembered. He recalled, too, that it was upon his urgent recommendation that the youngster had won his first chance, as a staff assistant, to prove himself.

A slow smile bent the President's clean-cut old mouth. There had been other boys of his choosing. Ballard, of '89, for instance. Ballard, who, starting in a yellow-headed stuttering hobbledehoy of twenty, had built up the School of Engineering, year by year, until, from a listless fumbling course of mathematics, alternated with straggling hours of drawing

and half-hearted shop-work, it now stood systematized, thorough-going, powerful, a centre of service to half the continent. There was Curtin, of '90, whose infinite capacity for hard work, and whose boundless gift for bullying, had wrung from a stiff-necked and rebellious legislature appropriation after appropriation, till his laboratories rivalled the great European schools in equipment and in efficiency. There was Pope, slow, humorous, gentle, always a little behindhand, who had spent the marrow of his working years in reorganizing his law courses, but who now stood secure in the knowledge that no department of the University could excel his own, in solidity of fundamentals, in perfection of detail. Not a man among them but had accomplished some definite service for his college. They were all born masters; able, resourceful, confident; picked men. And he himself had picked them, each for his work, with unerring sight.

The harsh disheartened furrow across his forehead yielded a little. Throughout these thirty-six years, his own work for the college had been a thing of shreds and patches. He had never found time to build up one department, to plan one single course. But at least he had known how to choose the men who could achieve. At least he had accomplished that much for his University. Although that was little enough. Year after year, he had planned some one complete and rounded undertaking: year after year had sped past, each day crowded to the farthest

hour with the myriad scattering duties that left no time for the one real achievement. He had had to learn smatterings of twenty professions in order to fill one. He must be teacher, architect, orator, financier, diplomat, in turn. His record was all odds and ends; here, a method learned from some earlier educator; there, a promising theory, adapted and developed. He had never originated, never created; although he knew that, had he once put aside these clamoring lesser needs, and given himself peace and leisure, he could have created, and superbly. The hand of the maker was his, he knew, by unfaltering instinct. Instead, limited in resources, harassed for time, he had built up his school painfully, bit by bit, with the borrowed labors of other workers, with the borrowed thoughts and plans of others wiser than himself. His whole life had this borrowed aspect. Even his commencement address to-day, he reflected, with irritation, would be a Joseph's coat; a patch of quotation, an historical parallel, a resounding although battered platitude, a gilded fringe of poetical allusion, the pilfered thoughts of other men, pieced together into a motley jumbled whole. . . .

He straightened his lean old shoulders with an impatient fling. Thirty-six years! He smiled, a bit grimly, to remember how, in his commencement addresses of those earlier days, unable to find time and heart to originate, he had toiled to make his quotings and his truisms sound fresh, inspiring. He saw himself, with whimsical pity, that first year of his presi-

dency, a tired over-strung man of forty, entering upon his new work in a mood half-prayerful, half-desperate, weighed down to terror by the vastness of his undertaking, its merciless responsibilities. There had been ninety-one Seniors in the graduating class of 1882, his first year. He chuckled as he remembered how heavily the burden of those ninety-one young futures had hung upon him; how he had slaved, night after night, already dull and witless from his long day's work, to give them some message which should go forth with them, a guiding memory. His second self, that quiet impassive bystander, stood back and looked at his life, amused, yet with compassion. Here he stood, a very tired old man, still in harness, though he had long since passed his allotted span. He was living and working on borrowed time—forever a borrower! . . .

He felt a sudden ugly envy of these others, his subordinates. Douglass, with his School of Mines; Curtin, with his laboratories; Pope, with his law courses; even old John, the head gardener, with his clipped hedges, his velvet lawns, his idolized rose-gardens. If he himself could only point to one building, one course of study, one flower-bed, even! And the final sting lay in the knowing that, even could his life be given back to him, to shape again, he would be powerless to undertake its rebuilding. True, it was only a mass of fragments, a scrap of mosaic; but it was so intricately set, so fitted into the bends and turns of other lives, so framed into the structure

of the school itself, that of his own will he could never dare to ask its change. His hour to create, to give of his own soul's inheritance, had slipped through his hands. The years to come would be as the years gone, a narrowing caravan of hueless days. Yet his soul hungered with the deep inarticulate hunger of every other human soul, to wrest some one achievement that should be absolutely his own: to leave some mark upon the trodden road of his own time. . . .

A blare of music crashed across the lawns. Down the long path came the Senior procession, an endless double line of straight young figures in wide-flowing black, of flushing faces and gay eager eyes, of stately young heads held high. The President looked down on their brave pageant with a vague quiet gaze. Past these nine hundred crowding faces he seemed to see, dimly thronging, innumerable, the faces of those thousand, thousand others, the boys and girls who had marched down that blossoming path through the years so long gone. For the moment, his look shadowed, dully. Then he turned to the procession again.

The Engineering Class swung now into view; rank on rank, keen, clear-eyed, spirited, confident, with their eagle look of concentration, early learned, their striding gait of the outdoor world. He met Ballard's proud eyes upon them. No wonder. Then came the graduates in medicine, Curtin's boys; he caught Curtin's deep-drawn stealthy breath of satis-

faction as they tramped cheering by. Then Pope's law class; he need not look across the portico to see Pope bend toward them, red spots on his gaunt cheek-bones, his dull eyes shining. Well, they had a right to their complacency, these other fellows. Every man of them had set himself a definite certain task for the University. Every man of them had attained his end, had made good his pledge. Certainly, you could not wonder.

The long morning of exercises dragged, interminably. To the President, sitting erect and tranquil on the broad stage, backed by his serried Faculty, each separate minute went on feet of lead. The huge auditorium, crowded to its walls, first with the class itself, then with the countless multitude of their relatives and friends, was a pit of smothering heat. The programme, unnecessarily elaborate, dragged its slow length through soul-wearying hitches and delays. The audience sighed, and fanned, and rustled, and whispered. From time to time, exhausted groups fled, sheepishly, to the outer air. The orator of the day, a famous diplomat, could not hold the people to even a surface interest. He was a man of exceptional powers, and of charming presence; his address, scholarly, felicitous, brilliantly original, fell on his limp hearers, flawless sentence by sentence, never rousing a ripple of response. Sheer discomfort, long drawn out, had numbed them to apathy.

The President looked down on them with amused commiseration. A pet catch-phrase—"Cheer up; the

worst is yet to come!" floated through his mind. The worst, indeed, was yet to come; his own speech, his Farewell to the class. It was a borrowed effort, a patchwork, as usual. He winced as he thought how banal it would sound, how obvious must be its guileless plagiarisms, its well-worn appeals, following upon the orator's fine balanced arguments, his vivid individuality of phrase, his suave engaging logic. However, it was the best that he could do. With the growing self-distrust of old age, he dreaded to risk his own judgments. Better the faded axioms of another than glittering bombast of his own.

The orator concluded his peroration with an eloquent flourish of trumpets. There followed thunderous applause. Through its reverberations one heard the heart-felt sigh of unutterable relief.

The President rose, bowed slightly to his colleagues, and stepped forward. There was a quick patter of applause, then silence.

As he looked down at his people, the man felt for the thousandth time an inexplicable sensation: the sensation which he always experienced when he found himself facing a great college audience. He had no easy illusions. He knew himself an unassuming speaker, and one without magnetism. Yet, with his first word, he could perceive, always, the instant attuning of his hearers to his mood. He could feel his audience swing to his hand, like a turning boat. He could never understand his hold upon them. It made him feel bored, a little foolish. To-day, as he

looked out over the great suffocating hall, he could see this wave of recognition, of an understanding that was almost homage, sweep through the room, like a gust of rain-washed soothing air. Strained faces relaxed; the buzz of whispers and the flutter of fans dropped to a breathless hush. A moment the President surveyed them, with steady eyes. Then, in a silence that paid him not only respect but reverence, he began.

His speech would be short. It had that one virtue, he assured himself. His dreary dual humor was again upon him; he listened with a sardonic amusement to his own voice, carrying, musical, serene, as it swung through the accustomed round of florid generalities, of high-flown ornate exhortation. He himself stood back and viewed himself, this bland embodied Platitude, in cap and doctor's hood, pouring out his stale insipid wisdom. His scorn was not for himself alone. He owned a frank disgust toward his audience, even more toward his attentive Faculty, who were listening, not only with decorous observance, but with actual interest. That they should thus sit unflinching, hearkening with such faces of respect to all these flagrant truisms, argued better for their courtesy than for their wit.

He reached his conclusion. He halted a moment before his climax. His last trite familiar appeals echoed taunting in his ears. "Be sincere." "Give always of your best." "Serve your generation. You have no time to lose in serving yourself, one man

alone." "No matter what your straits, keep faith with God and with your fellow-man."

In the brief pause, he felt again that pulse of eager assent, that curious thrill of sympathy. He looked down at the ranks of young faces, absorbed, intent. He stole a glance at his Faculty. To a man, they were leaning forward, their eyes fixed upon him. Not a syllable had escaped them. His thin mouth twitched. What witless humor possessed his audiences, that they must forever receive his borrowed rhetoric as sovereign prophecy, that they must sit breathless and wide-eyed before this sounding brass of platitude? What could it mean?

Suddenly the great sunlit hall swam dusk before his eyes. His face grew very white; his veined old hands trembled on the reading-desk. Quietly, simply, as all royal gifts are vouchsafed, there had come to him a vision of the truth. Before that miracle of understanding he stood abashed and humbled, even in the white exaltation of its splendor.

To these his people, waiting silent before him, the phrases in which he chose to clothe his thought meant less than nothing. If he saw fit, he could borrow the purple and the blazonry of every orator and poet since the world began. That would not matter. They had no care for the garb of his belief. They were looking past his words, past his thoughts, even, into the life that loomed behind. To these men and women, his words were real, were vital; for they could receive them, not as mere amiable advice, but

as the speech of experience, tested in the crucible of daily living. He stood before them a man whose whole life had showed forth the very principles that he professed; a man who had upheld, through seventy years, the very precepts that he now urged upon them. He was commanding them: Be sincere. Give always of your best. Well, he dared command. For he himself had held himself to sincerity; he had given always of his best. He dared set forth these laws, for he himself had proven them. So far from speaking platitudes, he had spoken only truth, as he had lived it. And as truth made visible. compelling, his people now. received it.

He felt himself swept past his world on that torrent of sublime and terrible realization. Truly he had measured out his best to life, overflowing. And in the measure that he had meted, it was now meted to him again. To him was vouchsafed the supreme immemorial requital: that he could dare to look back upon his own life without shame: that he could dare to judge his own days—and be content. With all his might and all his talents, he had served his generation. True, he had built up his college as he had built his own days, from shreds and patches. But it would stand: for it was set upon the living rock of his integrity. Of his own life, by all its crowded days, its heart-sick nights of vague success and heavy failure, he had made his gift to his time. And, even in his passion of humility, it was now granted him to understand: that this his life, his record of stain-

less daily toil, should be forever to his college its richest treasure, its noblest heritage.

He lifted his gaunt old head. Something of the brave radiance of his self-forgetting days pulsed through his voice and illumined, as with the immortal light of his own being, the final borrowed words:

> " 'Oh, young Mariner,
> Down to the haven,
> Call your companions,
> Launch your vessel,
> And crowd your canvas,
> And, ere it vanishes
> Over the margin,
> After it, follow it,
> Follow the Gleam.' "

Late that evening, young Prentice Keith, a favorite lieutenant of Curtin, '90, dropped into his chief's study for a moment's chat. Keith, a recent graduate of a small but venerable Eastern college, was new to this Western university, as well as to the West itself. Arraigned before his severe young judgment, this huge rough-cast modern school presented flaws and solecisms which impressed him regrettably. And he took his own impressions very seriously indeed.

His errand concluded, he stood looking out on the dark gleaming Campus, a shadow-garden, lit with rainbow lanterns, surging with a vast merry crowd. The college band forsook its marches to romp through popular airs set to rag-time; the Seniors walked no longer in scholastic state. Instead, they

went ringed in a fond body-guard; fathers, mothers, sweethearts, aunts, winsome young sisters, and whooping small brothers. The scene had all the picturesqueness of a garden party, all the naïveté of a county fair. It was academic to the eye of faith alone.

Curtin, '90, viewed his pensive subordinate with a commiserating eye.

"Rather crude, aren't we?" he said, kindly. "Remember, we're still young, and inclined to cavort a bit. Even if our capers are elephantine, you'll have to make allowance. How did you pull through this morning?"

"I just did pull through—barely," admitted Keith. "It *was* rather awful. Really, now!"

"All of it?"

"All. Except, perhaps, the President's address. That was different. Decidedly too florid, too emotional. Yet it seemed to fulfil the occasion, somehow."

Curtin lit his pipe.

"Exactly," he agreed. "The President always does fulfil the occasion. You couldn't put it better."

Young Keith concluded that he had been unduly magnanimous.

"Although, as I say, there was too much. He dragged in every grand sentiment and glorious aspiration ever voiced, from Socrates down. Chunks of erudition, oodles of ideals. Embarrassment of riches, don't you know."

"Yes. Yet we need it. All that accumulated wealth of ages, and more, too." Curtin stood up. His powerful body bulked huge against the shaded light. His massive face took on lambent intelligence. "We're the laborers of the earth, mind you; we pin-feathered surgeons and teachers and engineers are making ready to bend our backs to an almighty heavy load. We need all the food and training and knowledge that's coming to us, to make us fit. And we've fed our bodies, and disciplined our minds, and now, Prex gives us something that will make all our slaving and failing and succeeding worth while." He halted, with comical Anglo-Saxon panic at finding himself suddenly near great depths. "'If there be no vision, the people perish.' See?"

"I see." Keith nodded. "Yet why all this mass, of such diversified exhortation at that? Would not an address of more specialized interest, narrower, perhaps, but more logical, have made a higher appeal?"

"He can't afford to risk leaving out anything," returned Curtin. "We've got to have the best, and all the best—oodles of it, as you say. Can't you understand, kid, that we're the wheat, the groundwork of the nation, the embodied commonplace? Leave your specialized interest, your rounded periods, to the older schools, of slow leisurely development. We can't wait. We mustn't stop to split hairs. We've got to settle into the collar, quick, but we must have a star to watch, to keep us from settling

too far down in the collar. We need all the ideals we can carry. And Prex gives us the very best. Not his own little particular one-man make, either. It's the heaped-up treasure of all time. And Prex is the one man who is big enough to give it."

"He certainly is bigger than anything he says," Keith granted it generously. "Curious, though, your ground that the common people should need, not only the most thorough discipline, and the soundest training, but also the highest ideals—and, as you say, the most of them."

"Considering that they're the bed-rock of civilization, you'd naturally want to see them pretty solid, and clean-built, too, wouldn't you? And come to think of it,"—Curtin wheeled on him with a spark in his eye, "What about you, yourself? Aren't you one of them? Aren't you shoulder to shoulder with us, right with the crowd? Where else do you belong?"

Keith, the aristocrat, hesitated, almost sulkily, under his chief's shrewd gaze. Then he turned, with a quick boyish gesture of shame-faced laughing assent.

"Precisely where I belong. Right with the crowd. No doubt about that."

"And a good place it is, too," nodded Curtin through his smoke rings. "Which reminds me—who was it said that the Lord must love the common people, He had made so many of them?"

THE MASTER STRATEGIST

RIGID in immaculate linens, whiter than white samite, the admiral sat at the veranda rail. There was not a glint of expression in his hard, handsome, elderly face. His heavy jaw was set. His narrow ice-blue eyes, always so oddly light in his bronzed face, stared unblinking, past columned marble and velvet-green terrace, past the rainbow sunken gardens, past the gray cliff-rim, down to the silver bar that was the sea.

Across the veranda, sheathed like an ancient empress in her dull-hued sumptuous wrappings, his aunt sat watching him. She had laid down the knitting which her restless old hands craved. Against the rich blurred silken rug that covered her knees, that gray-yarn sock, with its homely needles, fairly stuck out of the picture, as comically astray as a dandelion in the flaunting exotic borders below. Above their naïve pastime the aunt's brown, withered hands lay locked and tense. Half-hidden in swathing lace, her brown face peered out, masked inscrutably beneath its hundred wrinkles. Her deep eyes, hooded in dark, shrivelled lids, like the eyes of a tired old hawk in the sunshine, held a dim yet steady flame. And on her face lay a faint amusement, a queer sardonic gleam.

She was eighty-seven years old. For twenty of

those interminable years she had sat in her chair, bound prisoner. On her face glimmered always that calm, pitying humor of one who, aloof, waiting, has long watched the hurrying world rush by on its futile road. Although, as a flippant grandson once put it, there was precious little that had ever got by Aunt Celestia.

At length she spoke.

"So you've made up your mind. Christiny shall not marry Lawrence Gardiner. That's settled and solid. H'm. Then why are you actin' so pouty, 'Siah?"

The admiral squirmed. When you have toiled for half a century to live down a droll old rustic name, it is a little trying to have that buried chagrin dug up once more. Worse, he felt darkly that Aunt Celestia often dragged it out, much as she dragged out her own quaint old ways of speech, purposely to heckle him a bit.

"Yes. I have made my decision. It is final."

"That's no great job for an Ipswich Stafford." His aunt fumbled with her needles. Her voice was amazingly young. It flowed with a round sweetness and depth from her lean old throat. "The Staffords were all as set as the Champney Elm. Queer, that the Stafford blood in Christiny doesn't bob up, right now, and have its say. But that child gives up to you at every turn. And she's your own granddaughter. I don't understand it."

The admiral frowned.

"Christine is a dutiful child. As to disposition, she is very like—" he halted. Then his harsh face lighted with a curious inward shining. "She is very like Marianna used to be. Marianna was always so —so gentle." That white glow vanished from his face. He sagged a little in his chair.

"Anybody'd need to be gentle to live in the same house with you, 'Siah. Or with me, either. Now, why aren't you satisfied with Lawrence?"

"It is no use to discuss my reasons, Aunt Celestia."

"I aim to discuss 'em, just the same." Aunt Celestia's needles snapped. "Lawrence is good blood. None better in New England. He's well educated; stood up head at Harvard Medical, they say. He's poor, of course. But he has eight hundred a year. So they needn't starve outright. He has three good hospital offers this minute——"

"You must have looked him up thoroughly, Aunt Celestia."

"I did that. What else do I keep my secretary-woman for? And he's young, and healthy, and grand to look at. And he and Christiny think the world belongs to them. Now, 'Siah, it's your turn."

The admiral glowered at the horizon. He held his venerable aunt in deep esteem. Yet in his soul he longed to order her to the brig for insubordination.

"I have little to say." His face dropped into iron grooves. "Christine is too young for marriage."

"She's twenty-two. You were twenty-three when her ma was born, weren't you?"

"That was very different, Aunt Celestia. Christine is only a child. And Lawrence is a spoiled cub. He has no judgment."

"No judgment?"

"He wants to resign out of the service. When I myself suggested his appointment as surgeon on the *Connecticut!*" The admiral reddened ominously. "Says he has 'other plans for his life-work.' Impudent young blockhead!"

"Oho. So he won't be a navy doctor? Wants to stay out and be his own boss?"

"Listen, Aunt Celestia. That boy is a waster, I tell you. An utter waster. He has heaved all his chances overboard. He has mulled in his laboratory two years, hunting a serum for infantile paralysis, till he has turned his cocky young brain. He thinks he's hot on the trail of an infallible cure: so, if you please, he has declined the appointment that I, myself, advised! Turned it down. Hard!"

"Oho."

The admiral began to stutter.

"Yes. Says all the godlike splendors of gold braid and buttons aboard the *Connecticut* won't balance a working laboratory ashore. Says the minute the government really needs him at the front, he'll be there, with bells on. But, till that time, he's going to stick to his job of saving the lives of a few thousand young citizens, instead of going along to coddle a ship-load of husky marines!"

"Well?"

"Well! Says he hopes to devote his life to 'preventive medicine'! Preventive poppycock! Says he's willing to earn his bread, and Christine's, as a public-school physician in New York. Can you believe that? The craven young hound! With the very whip-handle of fame laid in his hands, he'll chuck it away, to go ashore and spend his days on a crew of polyglot east side youngsters! He'll turn his back on the American navy, he'll take a piffling land-lubber's job, because it will give him plenty of measles and mumps to practise on, and three or four hours a day to tinker with his condemned germs!" The admiral sat back, quite purple.

"Yes." His aunt nodded. She bent over her knitting. "I've talked with Lawrence myself. He's some obstinate, too, 'Siah. Says he's perfected a new stain, and that means, he'll be able to sort out some germs that have never been sorted before. 'Isolated,' he calls it. Says, if he can just isolate that one cruel little paralysis germ, and find its anti-toxin, he'll be prouder than if he'd blown up all the navies of Europe." She raised her dusk lids and gave the admiral a long glance. "That's no ha'penny aim, Josiah. It's the fighting will of the great pioneers, the great discoverers. If I was you, I'd full as lieve watch my grandchild's husband build up health for coming generations as build himself a fine figure in the navy. What d' you say?"

The admiral found his broad sea-way blocked by a small but convincing reef.

"I want Christine's future provided for. I don't propose that her life shall be cramped by her husband's limited means."

"Tut, tut. Christiny won't be a pauper. Unless I live forever, she'll be pretty well fixed. Try again, Josiah."

"I do not like Lawrence's change of plan. It looks as if the boy were vacillating."

"Maybe Lawrence and Christiny want to do their own plannin'. Listen, Josiah." Her sweet, deep voice rose, challenging. "When folks are young and healthy and high-spirited, they don't ask to be settled. They want to break away from the trodden roads, to set out and explore. If I know Christiny, she's eager to share Lawrence's life to the last ditch. She won't care whether she's rich or poor, long's she knows she's Lawrence's partner. And knows she's doing her share." Her voice rang on a strange and passionate note. "My, what wouldn't I give to be young again! An' startin' out with my own partner —an' doin' my share!"

The admiral fell back upon vested authority.

"Christine will listen to my advice. There is nothing more to say."

There was a long silence. It might—perhaps—have been the silence of defeat. At last Aunt Celestia's needles began again their clicking rhythm.

"Where will Christiny stay next month while you're

conducting battle manœuvres? Can't I keep her with me?"

"Thank you, Aunt Celestia. But Mrs. Fitzgerald Jones has begged me to let her have Christine for a month. At Lenox, you know."

"Mrs. Fitzgerald Jones!"

Aunt Celestia's knitting fell from her hands. Her lean old body stiffened erect. Her eyes blazed wide.

"That dough-faced Ensign Jones's ma! I see. You'll send Christiny to visit them. You'll give that sissy young snip every chance. Right over poor Lawrence's head!"

The admiral leaped up as if a mine had exploded under his port bow. Aunt Celestia stormed straight on.

"I know now, 'Siah. That's why Lawrence doesn't suit! Fitzgerald Jones has two millions in his own right. And *he'll* never worry you by vacillatin' behavior. He hasn't enough git-up-and-git to vacillate, if he tried. So you're deliberately puttin' those children apart! So you're deliberately planning an engagement——"

"I'm deliberately doing nothing of the sort!" roared the admiral. "I'm the last man on earth to force Christine into an unwelcome marriage. But give the sissy snip his due. Jones is not an entrancing object, I'll admit. But he has money, position, a settled place in life. All those things count. Your idea that Christine shall be her husband's partner, share his struggles, fight beside him to the last ditch

—all very charming, Aunt Celestia. But those romantic days are past and gone. Moreover, Lawrence has had the whole road. Now Jones shall have his chance. And I'll wager you anything you say, Aunt Celestia, that Jones will win!"

Then the admiral looked down the garden. And the admiral's mouth closed with such precipitation that he narrowly escaped biting his eloquent tongue.

Up the terrace came two loitering figures. The late sunshine laid kindling fingers on Christine's fair head, her beautiful downcast face. Close beside her walked young Gardiner, that burly, splendid young giant, his black head bent eagerly above her grave white loveliness. The two mounted the stairs and greeted the elder people deferentially. But it was obvious that to their blank intent young eyes the stately Aunt Celestia and the commander-in-chief of the North Atlantic Fleet were as the marble columns behind them. Silent, as wrapped in some still enchantment, they wandered down the veranda to the deep arch where late wistaria drifted in violet shadows on the marble floor.

For a long minute the admiral stared absently at Christine. Then, with an odd, sharp sigh, he turned away and sat looking out to sea.

Aunt Celestia knitted on. Her face was tranquil as an ancient mask. At last she spoke.

"See, it's the eighteenth that battle manœuvres begin, 'Siah?"

"Yes."

"I've always laid out to ask you just what battle manœuvres are." Her voice was suave as honey. "I wish you'd explain 'em, slow and easy, so I'll understand."

The admiral looked at the two rapt young faces, deep in the wistaria shade. This was tactful of Aunt Celestia. He took up the shrewdly neutral topic.

"Battle manœuvres are battle manœuvres, that's all. Our ships, the Red Squadron of the North Atlantic, are ordered to attack a certain port. The Blue Squadron is sent to defend that port. All methods of actual warfare are used. Torpedoes, submarines, night attack, everything."

"If you'd get a chance, would you slip up on the other admiral, 'Siah? Would you take him by surprise?"

"*Would I?*" The admiral's glum face warmed with delighted reminiscence. "Don't you remember the time I bagged Admiral MacMahon and his whole division?"

"What did you do to him, 'Siah?"

"Do to him? Put him cut of action. Forced him to unconditional surrender." The admiral chuckled sinfully. "My orders were to hold him back from attacking Provincetown. He, on his part, was to take Provincetown, and scoop in my squadron at the same time. Now, I know MacMahon pretty well. So I sent a decoy after him. One of my crack destroyers, looking completely disabled, was towed diagonally across his course, headed for Boston

Light. MacMahon is a grasping old pirate. I'd counted on that bargain-grabbing nature of his; I knew he couldn't see one lone destroyer limp by, without giving chase. Give chase he did, though it was late afternoon, and threatening fog, and a mighty ticklish chance. My destroyer dodged into Fairport Harbor. Pelting after, like so many rats into a trap, came MacMahon's ships. They were within a mile of the breakwater when the fog rolled in. That was all I wanted. My ships were hidden just past the headlands. We came steaming round the cape, and bottled him up at the harbor mouth before you could say Jack Robinson. That trick put his whole squadron out of action. It would have cost him his sword in real war. Poor old MacMahon! He was pretty well cut up."

"So you treat the other admiral just like your enemy." The clicking needles stopped short. Beneath the hooded lids Aunt Celestia's old eyes lighted with a cold flame—like the eyes of a wise old hawk, dozing in the sun. "You'd fool him with a decoy boat, then slip up and trap his ships, and disqualify him as an officer——"

"Nonsense, no. Not 'disqualify.' Never." The admiral glanced restively at those still, absorbed young faces. "To lose is no proof of inefficiency. It shows that the loser is lacking in strategy. He is short on forethought. He isn't watching out for surprises. 'The essence of strategy is forethought,'" he quoted, a little pompously. "Precisely as 'the essence of tac-

tics is surprise.' I outplayed him, that was all. And there is no ill feeling between MacMahon and myself. The old chap is a good loser. I could not pay him a higher compliment." There was a mild complacence in his eye.

"I see." The steady needles flashed on. Again the admiral looked at the two in the wistaria shade. Again that odd wistful light crossed his harsh face. They did not heed his glances. Their quiet voices came and went, low as the bee-murmur in the garden below.

He glanced at Aunt Celestia—her helpless, chained old body; her dim old face, with its brave humor, its stony patience. His own face softened. What a long, strange, eventful comedy her life had been!

Seventy years ago Aunt Celestia and his mother had been sisters together in a quiet old Puritan home, back in the New Hampshire hills. Celestia was the elfin changeling of that sober flock, a beautiful, vivid, self-willed girl—"our cardinal-flower," he had heard his mother call her, many a time. Celestia was destined for the missionary field. So her pious father had decreed. But when she was seventeen Warren Boardman, her boy sweetheart, now a daring young adventurer from the West, came back, and demanded her for his wife.

Kind, inexorable, her parents put him aside. Their Celestia was called to a higher path. Their Celestia, however, arose straightway, and packed her skimpy little hair trunk. Then she called her kinsfolk to-

gether. Over and over the admiral had heard his mother tell those quiet, defiant words.

"Warren is not just my lover. He is my man. He is the other half of me. We shall be wed to-day. Then we go away, to the Far West—to Ohio. You will choose, my father, whether we go in peace or in anger. But go we shall. For we two are one flesh."

Swallowing his wrath, the wise father had given her a seemly wedding, and a brand-new feather-bed. Insolently happy, she and her Warren had set their faces to the sunset.

For twenty-two years they had toiled and prospered. Celestia's rare letters home were so many exultant chronicles of thriving children, of widening lands. Then came the Civil War. Warren and the two eldest boys joined the Union army. Celestia and the five younger children stayed at home and worked the farm—and waited.

In '62 Warren was brought home to her. For two years he was to Celestia as her adored piteous child. With her soul and with her body she cherished him, pouring her indomitable spirit into him, holding the life in his shattered flesh by the sheer power of her passion and her tenderness. In '64 he died. Then the two boys came back, worn and haggard, the spring of life broken in them. Celestia put her dead away and gave herself to her children.

The admiral remembered his first sight of her. Through those hurtling war years he had thought of her, his mother's dearest sister, with sympathy, yet

with a comfortable sense of her secure means. When the war broke out he knew that she and Warren had owned over a thousand acres of land. It was good to feel that she need not face hardship as well as bereavement.

In '71, not six weeks after he and Marianna were married, he was ordered to Vicksburg. By snatching a day out of their journey they could make a détour and see Aunt Celestia.

From a bleak way-station they had driven miles on miles, down through wet gray November country. They did not see the desolate roads, the bare, cold fields. Young and gay and successful, they were going to see Aunt Celestia—Aunt Celestia, herself the one young, gay, successful, vivid figure in all their bleak traditions.

"She's just like a cardinal-flower, mother used to say," he told Marianna over and over. And Marianna, all lovely eagerness, looked forward as to the vision of a princess—a princess in a strange palace, far away.

At last they drove up a miry lane and stopped before a low log house. Around it stretched dead gray bottom-lands. Above it hung a gray and bitter sky.

"This can't be the place!" Marianna's blue eyes were wide.

"Of course not. But I'll stop and ask the way."

A group of shy tow-headed children hovered round, and stared at the wonder of Marianna. One stam-

mered bashfully, would they not 'light and get warm?

They crossed the puncheon floor to the hearth. The dusky room was clean and bare, and gaunt as poverty. But over the mantel hung a queer little faulty drawing in india-ink—a girlish face, under languishing ringlets—his own mother's face.

Amazed, he turned to Marianna. Then he looked through the low door.

Up the dripping lane floundered two tired plough-horses. Their shaggy heads drooped. The black mud clung to their fetlocks. Behind them strode a woman. Her coarse skirts were heavy with loam. Her sun-browned face was ashen with fatigue. But she held her head high, and she entered her mean cabin with a noble graciousness.

"If I'd known you were coming, I'd have left my ploughing till to-morrow." Her deep eyes searched the man and the girl. "No need to tell me. You're my sister Evelina's own boy. And this is your wife?" She put out her big, stained hands, with a beautiful greeting. "And I—I'm Celestia."

This Celestia! This lank, gray, beaten field-woman, the cardinal-flower of his mother's wistful memory!

She had made them welcome. She had built up her scanty fire. She had set her poor best before them: bread and mush on earthen plates, and a hoarded golden morsel of honey. Nothing more.

"You'll think it shame that I don't even offer you silver spoons to eat with." She flushed painfully.

"But it's all gone, every piece. I sold it, and all our furniture, too, when I sold our house and came down here to live. I had to do it, so's to pay the taxes and hold on to our land. For—for *he* said I mustn't let one inch go." Her dark eyes burned with sombre fire. "Now he's gone, seems like the least I can do is to hold it fast. There's over twelve hundred acres, countin' the unbroke land in Michigan, and that forest tract in Arkansas. Folks say I'm foolish to try. But I'll never let it go."

She had kept her word. Summer and winter she slaved to hold that land. She rose before daybreak to cook and churn. She bent her weary back to the plough. She studied nights to help the younger children along. At last, long after she had seen her youngest child safely through college, when the grim, breaking strain was ended, then, with arch-irony, Fate turned the wheel. On the wild Michigan land copper was discovered. A year later a great railroad built a terminal on the very edge of her Arkansas forest. Wealth poured in upon Aunt Celestia, a golden stream.

She took it with the same sardonic quiet that she took the curious weakness that had already bound her to her chair. She gave bountiful allowances to her children. In her dead love's name she set up charities with a shrewd and generous hand. Then she did what nobody on earth but Aunt Celestia would ever dream of doing. Old and frail and helpless, she had herself carried to the sea-shore. There, on a

high cliff, she had ordered the building of this palace where she now sat, a moveless ancient chatelaine.

"Yes, it's queer I didn't go back to New Hampshire and fix up the old home, instead," she said crisply to her bewildered kin. "But I'm past eighty years old. And all my life I've hankered to sit and neighbor with the sea. *He* used to know. He promised me, time and again, that some day we'd go back and build us a house, high on a rock, lookin' straight out toward sunrise. And we'd fill it with beautiful things, and have all our friends to visit us. Now I shall have my house and my friends, and my sea, and my sunrises, just as we two planned. He'd be better satisfied so. And so shall I."

Those years which had brought her such changes had brought bitter changes to the admiral. His Marianna had slipped away within the year. Their baby daughter had grown to womanhood; then she, too, had been taken from him. Her three children came home to the admiral. They had been the pride of his lonely days. The boys were fine youngsters; but Christine—Christine, this tall, golden-headed, rose-cheeked young Dian, had somehow a deeper hold. The admiral was the type of man who loves to lavish on his womenkind. It rasped his grim loving old heart to think how little he had been able to give to Marianna and his daughter. Of late a dogged aim had crystallized in his mind. In so far as his slender income permitted, he had trained Christine to the habits and the view-point of wealth.

A girl of Christine's beauty and distinction—it was all very obvious. In time she would possess great riches. He would fit her for all the obligations that her high estate would entail.

Aunt Celestia's needles clicked on, a mystic tune. In the late sunlight they wove filmy arras on the marble floor, a mesh of eerie sorcery. Bent above them, her old face took on the veiled, watchful calm of an old necromancer watching her thin, potent web of shadow and sun.

"You planning to spend a week at camp, Josiah?"

The admiral brightened. Of all the sumptuous playthings that Aunt Celestia gave her guests, the Boars' Head Camp was his delight.

"I've been figurin' that you'd like to go. You'll find a whole parcel of my friends there. Doctor Benedict, and Judge Curtis, and so on. And—" her dark lids flickered. The silver needles were flying like airy shuttles in that charméd web. "You might's well take Lawrence along. That will show folks that there's no hard feeling. No matter what happens afterward."

The admiral's eyes twinkled at this guileless feminine surrender.

"That is a capital plan, Aunt Celestia. Lawrence will appreciate the opportunity. (And so will Fitzgerald Jones," he added, under his breath.) "I will talk it over with the boy at once. Lawrence!"

He stood up, a fine, imperious figure. Aunt Celes-

tia's slow eyes turned from him to the two reluctant children. Then her old face brooded, bland.

Sullenly yielding in every burly inch, young Lawrence lagged away beside the admiral. Aunt Celestia looked at Christine. Her needles plied on.

"You look taller than ever to-day, Christiny. Seems like you must be 'most grown up."

"I am grown up." Christine's beautiful grave face turned angry scarlet. Her slim young body shook. "I am twenty-two years old. When you were twenty-two——"

"When I was twenty-two I had a husband and three children, and forty acres of cleared land, and a four-room house. And I owned the earth."

Christine's soft, docile mouth set hard. She stared down at the blue-and-silver bar that was the sea.

Aunt Celestia picked up a stitch.

"Your grandpa and I have had quite a chat." Her deep old voice was silken. "He's going to camp to-morrow. Lawrence goes with him."

Silence.

"Young Mr. Jones will stay right here. Nice young man, he is. Kind of slack-baked. But that's no fault of his."

The goaded damsel turned.

"Which of us are you siding with, Aunt Celestia?"

"Siding with, Christiny!"

Christine towered above the wheeled chair.

"Because—oh, you know, you know what I mean! It's all grandfather's doing. He—he wants me to

have everything. The old pig-headed, precious lamb!" Quick mists blurred those angry young eyes. "If he wasn't so dear, it wouldn't be so hard for me. But he has set himself against Lawrence always. He won't try to understand. Aunt Celestia! Can't you ram it into his darling solid head?"

"Ram in what?"

"What all this means. For Lawrence and for me." All the passion faded from her face. She stood there, white, tall, very gentle. "Grandfather plans for my future. But what I want is, my Now. And Larry has been Now to me ever since I was old enough to pull his hair and take his blocks away from him at kindergarten. Nothing has ever mattered, but just Larry.

"Larry isn't just my lover, either," she blundered on, in her droll, inarticulate young speech. "He's a piece of me. He's the whole thing. That's why I took biology, all through college, so I could help him in his laboratory. I want to work right with him, and play right with him. Just as we've always done. We used to build sand-forts at the beach, and he'd be commander, and I'd be the garrison, and the other children would be redskins. Then he'd rush out and attack them, and I'd stay and hold the fort; or if the redskins were too much for him, I'd rush out and fight too. We always did things together. And now we want to keep right on doing things together. I'll take any chances, along with Larry. I wouldn't mind danger, nor terror, nor pain. I

don't suppose you can see what I mean, Aunt Celestia——"

"I can make out some idea."

"And grandfather wants me to give it all up. 'And make a suitable, successful marriage.' Oh, grandfather knows a lot about marriage, maybe!" She swept her wet lashes with a trembling hand. Then her blue eyes flashed, sweet, defiant. "But when it comes to Life, just you believe me, Aunt Celestia, grandfather has another guess coming!"

Aunt Celestia watched her race down the lawn in dryad flight. Her needles leaped fast and faster, clashing like pixy lances. Her old hawk eyes were points of light.

"Yes. Christiny put it pretty well. Josiah may know a lot about marriage. But when it comes to livin', breathin' flesh and blood, I reckon Josiah has another guess coming."

As always, the admiral found Aunt Celestia's camp much to his taste. He enjoyed every hour, although now and then the sight of young Lawrence's impassive face, the hard antagonism behind the boy's silences, gave him an ugly twinge. Each night he planned to talk the matter over with him and close the whole incident, kindly and finally. But somehow the opportune moment never presented itself. More, there were hours when even the admiral's disciplined memory broke bounds. Defeat is bitter to the young.

Then the blow fell.

On the last morning a fagged guide on a stumbling, lathered horse came pounding up from Eagle Point. He brought a telegram from Aunt Celestia —a grim, terrifying command.

"Come at once; bring Lawrence; tell entire party to follow immediately; I want you all here; it is Christine's wish."

Christine!

Baffled, panic-stricken, the two men dashed away, leaving the other guests to follow as they could. Heart-sick, bewildered to frenzy, they reached Eagle Point. There they found an automobile and a second telegram.

"Nobody dead, but come at once."

"That means Christine is hurt in an accident. Or else she's terribly ill. Why couldn't they tell us?" groaned Lawrence.

"Very likely it's Aunt Celestia herself." Shaken with dread, yet hotly angered at the torturing suspense, they rushed on.

It was early dusk when their car swung into the long drive. As they sped up through the lawns, their clutching fear yielded; for no pulse of terror thrilled in that calm air. In the twilight the great house bore a look of hushed and gracious festival. Soft light poured along the broad verandas. A deeper glow shone from the great windows. From the terraced garden there rose a misty amber gleam.

Aunt Celestia's excellent Pattison, looking very

badly flustered indeed, met the tired, excited men at the door.

"Madam requests you, sir, to come to her sitting-room at once. And, Mr. Gardiner, madam asks you to read this note, and begs that you will go to your own room—immediately."

Not waiting to hear Lawrence's astounded word, the admiral strode across the hall.

His aunt sat alone before her desk. The admiral's quick, anxious questions were silenced in amazement. He had never seen Aunt Celestia look as she looked to-night. It was not the flowing magnificence of her velvet gown, her pearls, her laces. It was the wonderful new light that fairly glowed upon her; a light that clasped her, enfolded her, like a very cloak of youth.

"Sit down, Josiah." Her voice rang high and clear. "Sit down, Josiah, I say. That big, solid chair yonder. You'll need it."

"What on earth——"

"Easy, Josiah. We haven't much time. It's just half past seven. At half past eight, Christiny is to be married. To Lawrence Gardiner. Bishop Soames performs the ceremony. You are to give her away. Go get ready now. You'll have to be pretty spry——"

"Christine—Lawrence! M—married to-night!" The words jerked gasping from the admiral's mouth. His face grew chalk-white.

"Yes. It's all fixed. Lawrence's mother just

reached here. She's some astonished, but she's mighty pleased. She's always loved Christiny dearly. I wired for the boys. They came this noon. Then there's a parcel of Christiny's school friends, too. They'll be bridesmaids. Now, I hope you're going to be real reasonable, Josiah. I'm dependin' on it that you'll behave just as good-humored as Admiral MacMahon did. That time you bottled him up in Fairport Harbor."

"What!"

"There, you've no call to feel mortified, Josiah. It's no proof of inefficiency. It just means that I'm older than you, and some smarter when it comes to gettin' what I want. I kept in mind what you said about the best part of strategy bein' forethought. Well, I used all the forethought I've got. And how the essence of tactics is surprise. Well, I guess I've surprised you, and everybody else. I've outplayed you, as you say. Seems like I opened a pretty mean bag of tricks." Her old hands played restlessly with her laces. "And you my own nephew, too. But when I'd listened to Christiny, and looked in that child's face, then I knew I was right. So I went ahead."

"If you'd just tell me! If you'd make it clear——"

She sighed, then smiled patiently, as at an unruly small boy.

"Well. First, I got you out of the way, and sent Lawrence with you. Then I set to work. I couldn't do much myself." She cast an ironic glance at her useless, swaddled limbs. "But I could run things from

my chair. Just as you run things from your flagship bridge. I had a-plenty folks to fire my guns for me." Her face broke into wicked crinkles. "Madame Céleste came from New York right off, and brought four sewing-women, and they made things fly. Christiny's wedding-dress is grand enough for a duchess. Then I didn't send out formal invitations. I had my secretary-woman write notes to a few folks that Christiny and Lawrence know best and like best. And to a few of my friends that they ought to know. Like Mrs. Woolverman, and the Kings, and the French ambassador and his wife. And Justice Wells, and the Richardsons from Brookline. And they all wrote right away, and said they'd be pleased to come. Then I had my secretary write a full account of the wedding and send it to *The Postscript*. And she sent a copy to *The Times*, and one to the Washington *Record*, too. It's published to-night. Here it is."

The admiral got his breath at last.

"What did Christine say to all this?"

Aunt Celestia smiled.

"Christiny hasn't cheeped. She doesn't hear nor see nor think. She's going with Lawrence. That's all she knows or cares. It's all I could do to haul her down to earth long enough to have her wedding-dress fitted."

She unfolded the newspaper.

"It says that 'the engagement was perfectly understood by the immediate family.' (That's you and me, Josiah.) 'But this early marriage will be a sur-

prise to many.' (That's you and me, too.) 'The young surgeon will be granted a week's leave, which will be spent at Mrs. Boardman's camp at Boars' Head.' No, he hasn't got that leave yet, Josiah. But you telegraph the department to-night, and they'll put it through. 'The ceremony will take place in the Italian garden of East Cliff, the north shore estate of the bride's grand-aunt, Mrs. Boardman. The Right Reverend William Carrington Soames, of Saint Stephen's, will officiate. The bride will be given away by her grandfather, Admiral J. Wentworth Stafford. She will wear a gown of point d'Alençon, the gift of Mrs. Boardman. Preceding the ceremony, the boy choir of Saint Stephen's will sing. The guests include——'"

She laid down the paper. Perhaps she winced a little as she turned to her nephew. But there was no anger in the admiral's face. Only a blank, blind, groping amazement.

"But why did you do this? Tell me why."

She glanced at the clock.

"I'll tell you why when it's all over. Though I misdoubt you'll understand, even then. Now go put on your dress-uniform. Too bad you and Lawrence got your noses so sun-peeled, but that can't be helped. Now—I'm hopin' you're going to be a good loser, Josiah?"

Blanched, voiceless, stepping high like a sleep-walker, the admiral went to the door.

"And— Come back, Josiah. I 'most forgot. *The*

Postscript says that your gift to Christiny is a string of matched pearls. Here they are. I sent for them the day you went away."

Obediently the admiral took the narrow white-velvet box that she pushed into his hand.

"Now hurry on your uniform. Then go to Christiny. Tell her you've brought her pearls. And that you want to clasp them on."

It was as if the mounting tide of summer had stopped at its flood to mark the high enchantment of Christine's marriage night. Topaz and fiery copper, chrysoprase and milky opal, the last sunset embers still burned on the gray east. A young moon hung low in the sky. Along the shore the soft night wind went whispering to the sea. Up through the shadowy garden came the call of the violins, rising, falling, like the pleading call of a human voice to wind and sky.

Under the lights of the pergola the guests waited, a stately company. At last, down the terraced stair came the lines of singing boys. Their sober child faces lifted; their voices soared, passionless, piercing sweet. Then came the bridesmaids, a blossomy file. White as a white star in her clouding veil, Christine floated past those waiting groups and stood beside her man.

Then up from the sea-wall, drifting silver, came a wraith of fog, like a strange and lovely guest. It wreathed the marble walls and columns in tapestry

of gossamer. It witched the fountain to spray of pearl. Through its dissolving vistas the great lighted house seemed to waver and grow thin. Marble and turf were only mist and spume. And all those scores of faces, those solid, substantial, vital folk, seemed far, unreal, and all the world was some blown pageant on a bubble's rim.

Yet two there were on whom its magic laid no spell. Against that curtain of shimmer and gleam those two young faces shone out grave and clear. Keen, aglow, flaming as with the sovereign fire of life, stood Christine and her man. In all that masque of phantom they might have been the only living, breathing creatures. Strong and bold their voices rang out as they stood together and clasped their daring young hands upon their vows—those immortal promises, ancient, terrible, beautiful, that bound them to each other, that made them one with the rest of life that suffers, rejoices, labors, gives.

The admiral went through it all like a man in a dream. He did not even flinch when he gave the child away. Always his eyes followed her with a still and tender awe; as if, in her new mysterious loveliness, Christine was not Christine. As if she walked before him, some dearer vision of lost delight.

The last guest had departed. The great house was sinking into its wonted quiet. Aunt Celestia lay among her cushions, her eyes fixed on the admiral's

face. Her own face was a little worn. As the irreverent grandson often said, Aunt Celestia was no quitter. But when you are eighty-seven years old, and half-paralyzed, and have just achieved a coup that has out-manœuvred the commander-in-chief of the North Atlantic Fleet, you will have some warrant for fatigue.

The admiral looked down at her. His face was still flaccid with perplexity. Back he swung to his eternal question.

"But, Aunt Celestia, *why!* Yes, I know. Lawrence is a good boy, an admirable fellow. And they have been comrades all their lives. In time, I suppose, I might have given way. But why couldn't you give me more time? Why couldn't you wait?"

"Because I hadn't time to wait, Josiah. I'm gettin' along, you know. And I couldn't rest easy till I'd seen this thing through. Christiny didn't have time to wait, either. Christiny is twenty-two this minute. She's gettin' along, too. And she and Lawrence must have their youth while it lasts."

"But how dared you? How could you be so sure?"

"I dared because I was so sure. Because Christiny isn't just Christiny. Josiah, can't you understand? Christiny and I—we're cut off the same piece. We're not the kind of women that just get married. Our man—he's our mate. He's the other half of us. We'll chance everything. We'll go the whole road. We'll share whatever comes. All we ask is, the right to share."

"But for Christine to give up all opportunity!"

"You mean give up Sissy Jones? My stars, Josiah! Don't you know the flesh and blood that your own grandchild has sprung from?"

She drew herself erect, her hands gripping the chair-arms. Her eyes flashed. Her voice poured out, deep and sweet and stern.

"Don't you know that Christiny is the breathing image of your own great-grandmother Davenport? Ever hear how, back in 1740, when the Indians were so troublesome, she went with her husband and helped build the stockade? Then how she stood watch and watch, all that month of the uprising, though she wasn't but a slip of a girl, and her baby not two months old? Then think of grandmother's sister, Emily Preston. Her husband went up on the mountain one day to chop wood, and he didn't come home at dark, so she went in search. Along midnight she found him, lying in the snow, half-frozen, with a tree-trunk pinning him down. She went back and fetched a sled, an' dragged it up the hills an' put him on it, an' dragged him all the way to the cabin. Then she started out long before daybreak to get the doctor. She got him, too, after she'd walked and run eight miles through night and snow, with the wolves howlin' all around her. And think of her daughter, Felicia Stafford. She and her husband went down to Kentucky only fifty years ago, and built their house on a ridge alongside the Mississippi, and along came the high water and swept out every house in the valley.

Felicia's husband was tryin' to save his stock, an' the flood caught him and threw him against the bluff and hurt him bad. Felicia swam out and got him, somehow. Then she nursed him day and night till the water went down, so's she could get him to the city. And there the doctors told her that it was his spine, and that it would take a year to heal. It took three years. All that time Felicia ran that farm, and took care of her children—she had four, and the oldest one goin' on nine—and managed to get to the city every month to see him. Though one time she had to sell her cameo breast-pin to pay her fare on the train. Don't talk to me, Josiah! Don't I know my own flesh? Ain't I sure?"

"But I wanted Christine to make a successful marriage—to have the money and the time to develop herself—to escape drudgery——"

"Money? Time? Cat's foot! It takes real livin' to develop folks. Give Christiny her life. Living won't spell drudgery to Christine and Lawrence. It'll be just a grand big game. Just like it was for Warren and me, Josiah!" Her voice thrilled on a strong and pleading note. Her eyes clung burning on his own.

"No, Josiah. Think! You couldn't bear to cheat Christiny out of what my life has given to me. You couldn't stand by and see her lose—what Marianna knew! Oh, Josiah! Christiny was right. You may be all very wise. You may know all about marriage, and all about success. But—oh, Josiah, when

it comes to life, you—you've got another guess coming!"

The admiral stared past her, silent. He did not seem to hear. His big, handsome, elderly figure sagged a little. Upon his hard, handsome face there came again that curious inward shining. It was as if that little name, so long silenced, held a tender illumining, all its own.

He turned and looked out toward the softly lighted garden, all silver shadow and misty glow, where Christine, fair star bride, had stood an hour ago. But the face that gleamed before his longing eyes was not the face of Christine.

At last he spoke, half to himself.

"Christine was very beautiful to-night. Somehow —it's the first time I have ever noticed it—she looked a little as Marianna used to look. Do you remember Marianna, Aunt Celestia? Though I suppose not. It's more than forty years——"

Aunt Celestia leaned forward in her chair. Her voice was very low.

"Yes, Josiah. I mind Marianna well. That one time you brought her to see me, the little, lovely, happy thing! And I mind how she'd look at you, and her eyes would sparkle, and her cheeks get pink; she was so proud of you, and of everything you did and every word you'd say. And I mind how glad she was to go to that lonesome river-country with you, though it was yellow-fever year, and cruel heat, and she must live just like your laborers did, cooped up

in a muddy little shack ashore. Yet she was prouder than Punch, and happy as a queen. Yes, Josiah. I remember."

But the admiral had not heard one word. His fine old face was spent and gray. His breath came short with stabbing memories. For the old brave, loving heart was torn within him.

"If Christine—if I thought——"

Then he turned his face to that old waiting, patient face. And he spoke out like a wistful boy.

"It's been a long road, Aunt Celestia. No, I wouldn't want Christine to miss what Marianna and I knew."

"Oh, Josiah!"

Suddenly she urged toward him. Bound prisoner that she was, it seemed as if the powerful mother-spirit of her would lift her worthless old body and carry it to him, to clasp him in her old powerful mother-arms, infinitely tender, infinitely compassionate. "Oh, Josiah! I knew time'd come you'd see, dear. I knew you'd understand!"

"CRABBED AGE AND YOUTH"

CALM and exalted as the red-granite charioteer who guides his steeds on the red-granite pylon of Queen Hatasu, these thirty immemorial centuries gone, the chauffeur loomed behind his broad glass shield. Sumptuous as Queen Hatasu's own chariot, from ponderous tires to glittering crested door, the great car rolled through the college gates, and stopped portentously before Cliffe Hall.

Apple-cheeked Seventeen, tripping down Cliffe steps, nudged Angel-eyed Sixteen at her side.

"That's Mrs. Cornelius Brinckerhoff's car. The Mrs. Brinckerhoff who gave Burnbrae School their gymnasium, ninety-foot pool and all. My—Oh!" Apple Cheek's dove-blue eyes grew very round. "Don't you hope she's brought a gymnasium in her carriage-bag for us too?"

Angel Eyes nodded, her rose-leaf mouth being inconveniently full of panocha.

"Yeth. 'Specially if it puts it over Burnbrae. Why, Martha, can that be the majestical Mrs. Brinckerhoff? Why, what a very old lady!"

With pretty deference, Apple Cheek and Angel Eyes hastened to assist the very old lady just alighting. Rather, the very old duchess; for Mrs. Brinck-

erhoff, short, stout, white-haired and rosy, yet transcended her background of lordly chauffeur and imperial car.

"You young ladies are students?" She fixed her escort with a terrifying although a tremulous lorgnette. "I wish to see your head mistress, Mrs. Stanton-Chase. She resides in this building?"

"Yes, ma'am. This is her receiving day."

"Ah!" Her keen blue eyes lighted eagerly. "Then I shall go up unannounced. We are very old friends."

She gave the girls a brisk, pleasant nod, and swept away toward the long marble flight, her sable cloak flowing regally from her plump shoulders.

"Nice old party, Pat."

"Um h'm." Angel Eyes took another large, placid bite. "But wouldn't you simply shrivel up and expire if you thought you'd ever live to be an old, old lady like that?"

"Wouldn't I!" Apple Cheek sighed, with tragic eyes.

A slow, commanding rap fell on the head mistress's study door. The mistress rose from her low chair, her beautiful ethereal face smiling with welcome, exquisite, formal, remote.

Then, as she saw the figure at the door, all that fine ivory punctilio melted and fell away. She stood motionless, wide-eyed. The elder woman, pink and flurried, laughed unsteadily: "Guess who!"

"Molly—Eliza—McClintock!"

"Yes, it's Molly McClintock. Didn't you know me, Barby? You darling, blessed girl!"

A moment the two old ladies stared, trembling. Then they stumbled into each other's arms. The mistress's waxen cheek burned crimson, her soft eyes flashed with tears, when at last she drew back to look on her friend. Mrs. Brinckerhoff's plumed bonnet tipped rakishly over one eye. She was sobbing and laughing in a breath.

"Molly! It has been so long!" The mistress clung to her tenderly, her voice catching between the words, her beautiful, fair old face vivid. "Molly, it can't be forty years!"

"It can't be anything else," Mrs. Brinckerhoff gave her patrician nose a final vicious dab, which left it pathetically scintillant. "My last glimpse of you was in April, '71. On your wedding-day, child."

"I remember. Yours was the last face I saw as we drove away." The mistress drew her plump hand close. "Little 'Lizabeth, all starched and ruffly, was hanging to your skirts, and you had set baby Richard on your shoulder. He was pulling the cherry wreath in your hair, and you were laughing up at him. You looked like a Madonna. And I looked back at you as long as I could see you." A shadowy pink warmed her soft, withered cheek. "It seemed like a good omen, somehow."

"I'd like to see myself hoist baby Richard to my shoulder nowadays."

"He hasn't really grown up, Molly?"

"Not unless you call forty-six years, and two hundred pounds, grown up. How he does despise being overweight! He takes right after me, poor boy."

"You!" The mistress scoffed, doting. "You're just as lovely as you were in '71."

"More lovely." Mrs. Brinckerhoff settled back, comfortably. "Sixty pounds more. But you keep your nymph look, Barby. You little, spooky, pretty thing! Do you mind the valentine James J. Duckworth made you, our first year at Oberlin? Lace-paper, with stuck-on red hearts, and 'Queen and Huntress, Chaste and Fair,' three verses, written in red ink? And how he let you imagine it was his own, and that you'd inspired it, till the day Professor Leach gave us Ben Jonson in rhetoric class?"

"Do I remember? The great *saphead!*" The mistress's angelic old face crimsoned. The shocking word slipped from her sainted lips utterly unnoticed. "*You* can't say much, Molly Eliza! You know well that you were his first choice. Can't I see him, goggling those pale-blue eyes across the classroom at you? And his pale-blue crochet nuby, that his mother made him wear, because his chest was tender. And his hair, slicked into a roach, with two ear-scallops——"

"With bears' grease, and spearmint for scent." Mrs. Brinckerhoff broke in, giggling rapturously. She sat with her plump feet tucked on the chair-round, her plump arms hugging her knees. Her blue

eyes danced, her cheeks burned deep rose-red. She looked like an impish girl, masquerading in frosty wig and fairy-godmother wrinkles. "Wasn't he the beatenest for perfumery! Mind how he'd philander around at our students' socials at Masonic Hall, and let us girls sniff his handkerchief? He always allowed me two sniffs, as a particularly tender attention. 'Balm of a Thousand Flowers——'"

"No, that was the label on his hair-oil bottle. I know, because your brother Samuel once stole the bottle from his room. And filled it up with whale-oil. I suppose Samuel's sons never stoop to such atrocities?"

"His grandsons stray, occasionally. Little Samuel—The Infant Samuel, they call him at Yale—stampeded the Freshman banquet at Wherry's with a fake bomb, last week. Little Samuel is the image of his grandfather. Remember that curly red head?"

The mistress's lips quivered into a shy smile.

"I remember that curly red head quite well. Perhaps Samuel has never told you, Molly. But we—we carried on a correspondence all through the war, from the day he left college with his regiment. And he sent me a lock of his hair——"

Mrs. Brickerhoff jumped. A wave of pink streamed to her crisp pompadour.

"A lock of his hair? I—I wish I could see that lock, Barby. Of course it's long since thrown away?"

The mistress looked at her reproachfully, then with

a glint of mischief. She stooped over a great cedar chest.

"Why, Barby! Have you kept your treasures, too?"

"Some of them." She lifted out a heavy old velvet album and unfastened the broad gilt clasps. Gently she drew from it a yellowed, embossed envelope, which revealed a lock of auburn hair, quaintly mounted on bristol-board. A languishing curlycue, fine and soft as a girl's.

Mrs. Brinckerhoff seemed to be controlling herself with difficulty.

"Barbara! Did you ever notice anything odd about this curl?"

"Why, no. Only it seemed a shade lighter than Samuel's."

"It is. Far lighter." Mrs. Brinckerhoff choked. "Barby! Didn't you ever guess"—then giggles overpowered her, "that—that all those lovely ringlets were my hair?"

"*Your hair!*"

Mrs. Brinckerhoff confessed between shamed chuckles.

"It was j-just Samuel's wicked deception. He came home on a furlough the day they shingled my hair. I'd had malarial fever. And Samuel pounced on four long curls, and cut them up into rings. And I mounted them for him. With flour paste. And he took four dozen ringlets back to camp with him. The other girls were always plaguing him for curls,

and it kept the poor lad's head shaven tight. He was always having colds in his head. But he hated to say no."

" 'The other girls!' " The mistress sat quite rigid. "Then he sent locks to other young ladies—besides myself?"

"D-dozens of 'em. To girls he'd never even seen, his comrades' sisters and cousins and sweethearts. Oh, Barby, don't look so shocked! All the soldier boys did it. I've heard Sam tell how the whole regiment used 'Lijah Cobb's tintype, because he was the handsomest man in the service. They used eleven hundred copies one year."

The mistress returned the fond memento to its case with unnecessary vim.

"Well! If I'd dreamed——!"

"There, Barby! Don't be so techy. Think how you treated poor Samuel! What about John? There, now!"

What about John!

The mistress caught up the album and turned hastily to her chest. A lovely flame-pink glowed in her cheek; her eyes grew veiled and soft.

"Molly Eliza, did you ever see this before?"

She held out a mass of rosy, changeable silk, brocaded in huge palm leaves. An incredible garment, shaped like a Titan's lamp-shade, flowing in shining billows over her slender arms.

Mrs. Brinckerhoff considered.

"I should say I had. You wore that dress the

night of the party *his* folks gave me. Six starched and fluted petticoats; and a red rose in your hair. And your bodice laced so tight that I had to pin the rose on for you—Mercy, Barby! Somebody rapped. Hide it, quick!"

Pale and panting, the mistress thrust the gleaming mass into the chest, and slammed down the lid as if she slammed it upon the fragments of a murder. Then, her gentlest dignity robing her, she trailed to the door.

A soberly pretty young girl awaited her; small, fair, dainty, with a sweet little gosling face. Meekly she made her request; permission to go to the city shopping, accompanied by a chaperon.

Graciously the mistress gave permission. With a dutiful little gosling courtesy, the child tripped away.

"So you let them go to the city, Barby?"

"Yes, with a suitable chaperon. By the way! Do you remember Susan Pearmain? That little girl is Susan's granddaughter."

"Susan Pearmain? A great, fat, blowsy girl?" Mrs. Brinckerhoff chuckled. "I should think I did. Don't I remember seeing her eat half a pumpkin pie at a Sunday-school barbecue? And here comes her granddaughter, asking for a chaperon—H'm. I mind that when Susan and Eph first married and went to Nebraska, Susan used to shoo Indians off her front porch with a rolling-pin. She wasn't more than seventeen, then, but she didn't need a chaperon for that.

Pull out that silk again. I want to see. My, my, that waist! Do you let your girls wear party dresses like that?"

The mistress twinkled.

"Not in these athletic days. You could hardly bribe a girl to try that bodice on."

"That reminds me, I want to build a gymnasium for them, Barby. Like the one I gave Burnbrae."

The Mistress twinkled again.

"A gymnasium! Molly, do you remember how we two used to sweep our own room, and carry up wood, and even split our kindling—except when somebody else did it for us?"

"Oh, and wasn't it fun!" Mrs. Brinckerhoff's round face shone. "Do you mind the fall we started to college together, driving all the eighteen miles in your father's grand new Dearborn? I wore a purple merino, and you had a spandy new buff delaine with saffron dots. My, weren't we fine! And the wagon bed was crammed with baskets that our mothers had fixed; eggs packed in oats, and a boiled ham, and a whole jar of your Aunt Emeline's ginger cakes, and a cheese, and honey; for board at Oberlin was two dollars a week, and we mustn't dream of such sinful extravagance. And our elegant new hair trunk, lashed on behind. My, how my neck cricked, spyin' for fear that trunk would fall off! And can't you see the walnut grove, where we camped for nooning, and your father shot a squirrel, and broiled it over the coals? And then the long, long white road, wind-

ing on through the beech woods, and the windy red sunset beyond? Oh, Barby, why can't we two drive that road again?"

Their eyes met in wistful question. Again the September wind blew in their faces, pungent, autumn-sweet. Instinctively they leaned, listening. Across that far unfathomable river of years, they heard the fretful call of the quail through hot, dry stubble, the long sigh of the prairie grass, as it swept the wheels of the grand new Dearborn; that endless drowsy tide of the prairie sea.

"And the folks in our class. Remember Adoniram Jones? He planted fruit-trees through the woods, like Johnny Appleseed."

"And Lissy Hunt. She married a missionary to Ceylon. She and her lisp and her curls—and her spruce gum! Did anybody ever see Lissy and that gum apart! S'pose she taught the natives to chew gum too?"

"And little fat Drusilla Weed. She was so bashful she couldn't recite her declensions without pigeon-toeing. She went down to Georgia after the war and started a Freedmen's School, and the Ku Klux burned her out twice, but she'd set right to and build it up again. Little scared, plucky, fat thing! And Peter D. Freeman. His father was a Grahamite, poor boy. They never had anything to eat at home but raw meal, and apples, and water. My, how he used to enjoy pork-and-bean night at Oberlin! He was the smartest scholar in our class. Unless—it was—John."

Again that swift irradiation gleamed on the mistress's tranquil face. She would not meet her friend's eyes.

Mrs. Brinckerhoff looked keenly at that flushed, musing face, that lovely, drooping head. Suddenly her fine old face grew very white. A curious tension narrowed her steady mouth.

"Barby, there's something I want to tell you. Something I ought to have told you . . . forty years ago. But I never did. I've let it stand between us all these years. Something about—John."

Then the mistress wheeled and faced her, blazing, passionate. Her wide eyes darkened. Her hands clenched, cold.

"Something about John? You need not tell me, Molly. We always understood each other, John and I."

"I know." Mrs. Brinckerhoff's face grew older, strangely gentle. She tried to speak. The words would not come. The mistress confronted her, moveless. Between the two women there seemed to rise a mysterious wall: shadowy, intangible; impassable as a wall of ice.

Mrs. Brinckerhoff put out her hands, with a quavering laugh.

"Don't look at me that way, Barby. I ought to have told you long ago. It has been a sore spot for us both. And it was all my hateful silliness. But—but I was dreadfully put out with you that year. Because you had more beaux than I had. My brother

Samuel, and both the Jones boys, and John too. It truly wasn't fair, Barby. And you led them a dance. 'Specially John. He was desperately in love with you, and you snubbed him cruelly. And, poor boy, he took me for his confidante. He was forever tagging me about, to tell me how wonderful you were, and I got some tired of it. So—I let you think he liked me—a little. I liked him myself, anyway."

"Yes," pondered the mistress, quite without mercy. "Yes; I know you did."

Mrs. Brinckerhoff swallowed hard. She spoke unflinching on.

"So I—I pretended. Right along. Though he never gave me a thought. Except when you had a contrary streak, and wouldn't write to him. Then I'd get a frantic scrawl, begging for news of you. And then I'd obligingly tell you, what a nice letter I'd had from John. Oh, I should have been smacked and set in a corner. I know that. But it wasn't fair, Barby. You with four beaux, and I with only three, and one of them James J. Duckworth! And you just more than crowing over me!"

She stopped, gulping. Angry tears stormed into her blue eyes.

The mistress caught her arm.

"Crow? Of course I did. *I had to!* It was my one chance to keep my own head out of the dust. For I was mad over John, Molly. From the first hour. I'd have followed him barefoot through the world. But he was so splendid, so far above me,

that I couldn't believe he really loved me. And I wanted to be so sure! Little goose that I was, I kept trying him, testing him, pushing him away. . . . No wonder it nearly killed me to see him look at anybody else!"

There was a silence.

"You poor little simpleton! To throw away all those years!"

The mistress drooped like a scolded child.

"I know. Wasn't I foolish! Wicked, too. And I was punished, Molly. For, after we were really engaged at last, we had to wait, and wait in earnest, till John could get his start. Six long years! Yes, I was punished."

Mrs. Brinckerhoff looked on her with tender mother-eyes.

"But it was worth waiting for. Wasn't it, Barby?"

"Worth waiting for!" The mistress locked her frail old hands. The great betrothal pearl shone white on the veined waxen flesh. All the ecstasy of her brief, exquisite wifehood glowed upon her, luminous, transfiguring. Old and frail and childless; yet she stood there, lovely with the loveliness of an embodied hope, crowned, triumphant. For her and for her lover the great stars had been lighted. Their radiance could never quite go out, their glory dim.

The elder woman leaned to her. Silently their lips met, across the fading shadow of that childish barrier.

At last Mrs. Brinckerhoff broke the silence with a sad little laugh.

"Ah, well, you had it all, Barby! And I have my children. I ought to be content. But I'm not. For Elizabeth and Richard are both so wise and grave and grown up, and they think, just because I'm past seventy, that I ought to stay in the chimney-corner and knit. And I just won't. There, now!"

"And you just sha'n't!" The mistress hugged her belligerently. "Much they know about it! You're younger and prettier than Elizabeth ever dared be, this minute. What wouldn't I give to see you in that peach barége with flounces that you wore to our class-night party! And your little tiny feet in clocked stockings and peach satin shoes! Look, Molly. Here!"

She snatched a silver-paper roll from the chest. Mrs. Brinckerhoff cried out, delighted. There lay two satin slippers, vivid pink, their gilded buckles hardly tarnished.

"I gave them to you! Because you were so bewitched with them. I'd forgotten."

"Could you squeeze them on, Molly?"

"Well, I'd hope so." With a daring fling of silken skirts, Mrs. Brinckerhoff tore off her sedate boot. Puffing and tugging, she crowded her plump foot into the slipper. "You haven't a shoe-horn? No, they're perfectly comfortable. They always were too large. Nonsense. It doesn't pinch. Not a mite. Where's your pink silk? Look!"

"It doesn't pinch. Not a mite"

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Twinkling, her plump cheeks scarlet, she threw off her rigorous tailored gown, and struggled into the wide swirling robe. Flowing skirts held high, she swept a dazzling courtesy to the enchanted mistress.

"Molly, you darling! Wait!" The mistress dived wildly into her chest. "I'm going to dress up too. Help fasten this, quick! And here's my sunshade, and my hat!" Sparkling with mischief, she perched a flat straw object, the size and aspect of a waffle, high on her soft braids. "Put on these velvet bracelets, Molly. And this torty-shell comb. Oh, dear, you look precisely like Miss Abigail Peabody, when she'd dance the lancers with Captain Tucker. Don't you remember? She with her sausage curls, and her green morocco shoes, and he with his brass-buttoned coat, and his frozen glass eye? Here, I'll be the captain, and you can be Miss Abigail. Turn out your toes and simper, Molly. Now!"

> " 'Tirra, lirra, toora, loora,
> Far beyond the Northern Sea!' "

Flushed, laughing, they minced and swaggered through the quaint old steps. Down the middle and back again, they pranced and languished; then, with one last flaunting courtesy, one pompous pigeon-wing, they stopped short, laughing into each other's eyes.

Absurd every step had been, delicious the carica-

ture. Yet in that masque there glinted something finer, rarer, sweeter than mere burlesque. Standing here in the faded robes of their youth, it was as if they threw down the gauntlet to all the golden promises of youth . . . then paid their challenge in full, with noble, ripened hopes; with brave and lovely years.

And as they stood, glowing, mirthful-eyed, across the park there echoed an ominous note; a distant summoning bell.

"Oh, oh! The first Vespers bell! I always preside. And—Oh, *look* at me!" Panic-smitten, the mistress stared at her frivolous image. Frenzied, she tore off her billowing finery. "It's all your fault, Molly Eliza. You—you Ninkum! To come here and turn my silly head, talking old times! Oh, oh, *where* is the button-hook!"

"There, take this hairpin." Mrs. Brinckerhoff struggled madly to escape her smothering flounces. "How did we get into the wretched things! Oh, Barby, in pity's name, take this hook out of my hair!"

Blindly they flung on decorous garments. Wild-eyed, they fled down the long hall. At the Chapel door there sounded an anguished moan.

"Barby! I forgot! I can't sit on the platform. I've got on that miserable pink satin shoe!"

"Sit on the shoe, then," hissed the mistress, grimly. "March right along!"

Seven hundred girls filed into the great, dim Gothic hall. The organ droned through a mellow prelude. Fair, grave, stately in her trailing black, the mistress rose and spoke with all her tender grace, her sweet spiritual authority.

Beside her on the platform, majestic as an aged duchess, sat her honored guest. Her handsome, highly colored face took on a soft, deepened flush when the mistress closed her talk with a brief touching reference to her visitor, and to the dear memories of their lifelong friendship.

Seven hundred girls hearkened to the mistress with their unvarying, adoring awe. Seven hundred girls, with faces of young-eyed cherubim, looked upon Mrs. Brinckerhoff, first with solemn admiration, then with pale, young sympathy. For, at the mistress's pensive references, her plump hand was seen to tremble on the chair-arm; a hint of tears clouded her clear, old eyes. . . . (A twitching pang leaped through her, a poignant terror. Warily she glanced down. But the long skirts safely hid the cruel pink shoe, still nipping, implacable.)

And on the rear seat, Apple Cheek heaved a gusty sigh, and punched Angel Eyes with a powerful thumb.

"They're two old dears. But just think! Isn't it too cruelly awful to have to be old old ladies like that?"

"Awful!" sorrowed Angel Eyes.

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BREWSTER BLOOD

A VERY little boy, dressed in long, tight, flounced trousers of yellow nankeen, and a skin-tight, brass-buttoned jacket of deep and lurid blue, sat stiffly on a tall chair in Grandsir Adoniram Brewster's front parlor. His tow hair was brushed high in a shiny roach, after the fashion, at once naïve and ferocious, of the year of our Lord 1833; his blue eyes snapped; his chubby face was so flushed with anger and chagrin that the cinnamon freckles on his plump little nose fairly stood out in relief.

Grandsir Brewster's parlor, high-ceiled, white-panelled, dim with a mortuary gloom, was crowded like Aladdin's cave with dusk strange splendors. At little Henry's elbow stood an ebony cabinet, inlaid with swarms of bees in mother-o'-pearl, crammed to its iridescent doors with ivory elephants and lumps of amber, and squat grinning gods in malachite and chrysoprase. That cabinet Great-grandsir Brewster had snatched from a Barbary pirate's sybarite cruiser in the roaring days of 1810. Close by, a pedestal of teak upheld the *Belisarius*, the stately Indiaman which three Brewsters had sailed as captain, her hull and masts cut from a solid wedge of ivory, her ropes of fraying silk, her blocks of

jade. Swung high in his perch of beaten silver, a great sulphur cockatoo glared down with fiery orange eyes. But none of these things moved Henry. Fat fists clenched, plucky blue eyes ablaze, he sat like a spunky little martyr before the grave inquisitorial council of his kin.

Seven years before, Cap'n Richard Brewster, Henry's bold, handsome young father, had been lost at sea. Till to-day Henry and his girl-mother had lived in Scotland with her own people, the Carmichaels of Balgonie. Well enough folk, the Carmichaels, great landowners and lordly gentlemen; but in Grandsir Adoniram's eyes a blustering, hard-riding crew, ill stock for a sober Salem Brewster to choose. At length Grandsir had summoned his son's wife and his son's child to Salem, their proper home. To-day all Henry's relatives were gathered to meet him and his pretty scared mother for the first time. And with the fine unwitting savagery of grown-ups, they were talking over little Henry, right before his scorching little face.

"He has no Brewster look." Second-cousin Levina stroked her puce flounces and gazed solemnly down her long yellow nose. Under its beetling turban, her gaunt yellow face looked like a big cross bird's face, thought Henry. He had a sacrilegious longing to feel her large nose and make sure whether it was flesh or beak. "No Brewster was ever linty-headed. 'Black as a Brewster,' that was the saying in my day."

"There may ha' been linty-head Brewsters before your day, Levina." Uncle Lysander snorted and flourished his ear-trumpet. "But the child is no Brewster. Short-legged men, the Brewsters were. Short, swinging steps they took, a true sailor's gait. But Henry, he straddles it off like a grenadier. And never a Brewster but narrowed his eyes against the sun. Squint they all did, from old Brimstone Brewster down. But little Henry stares against the sun, like he's got the eyes of a sea-gull."

Little Henry blinked miserably, and turned to peep past the great brocade curtains. Then he sighed for delight. Under the window lay a deep sunny garden. Beyond, a wide white beach, a tossing blue harbor. Straight out across the low-tide shoals stretched a narrow white causeway, perhaps half a mile long, linking a tiny sugar-loaf island to the mainland. On the island stood a columnar pile of gray rock: a ruined lighthouse. And back and forth on the causeway raced and frolicked a handful of children. Little Henry's mouth grew dry with yearning. Would the relations never let him go?

Then he jumped and turned back. For Grandsir Adoniram himself, exalted patriarch of all the Brewsters, was speaking now.

"I don't hold with you, Levina. Nor with you neither, Lysander. You cannot judge Henry by looks or actions. A Brewster is a Brewster, be his hair what color it pleases the Lord to make it. But

what plagues me"—his harsh old jaw thrust suddenly; his grizzled brows lowered over gray hawk eyes: "What plagues me—Harkee, Henry. What do ye aim to do when ye're man-grown?"

Henry's heart gave a wild thump. He looked across at his pretty, pale mother, shrouded in her heavy crape. He stood up and drew a resolute breath.

"I aim to be a laird, sir. Like my grandfather."

There fell a curious hush. The ranks of Brewsters stared, bewildered. Above, the ranks of dead-and-gone Brewsters on the high dim walls stared down with level scornful eyes.

"A laird, hey? Like your grandfather?" Grandsir's bristling head thrust forward. His deep voice rasped. "But I am your grandfather. And I was a sea-captain all my days."

"I mean a laird like my Scotch grandfather. Grandfather Carmichael."

"Your grandfather Carmichael, hey? H'm-m-m."

The hush deepened. It was an outraged hush now.

"But you are a Brewster. You are the only son of the Brewsters." Grandsir's voice rang, challenging. "Of course you will follow the sea. Your father was captain of a brave ship. So was I. So was your great-grandsir, and his father before him. You will be the ablest captain of us all."

Henry's spine stiffened under that challenge.

"But I don't like the ocean, sir."

"You don't like the ocean!"

Henry glanced toward that tossing, illimitable blue.

"I like the ocean to-day. But I don't like it when it's stormy. So I'm going to be a laird like grandfather, and have lots of dogs and horses, and be a soldier and fight. But I don't want to go to sea. Because it makes me afraid."

"Afraid!"

The word dropped like a plummet through that well of silence.

"Afraid! But then you are no Brewster. Never yet was there a Brewster that was a coward. *Afraid!*"

Henry did not flinch. But his mother sprang to her feet.

"Coward is not a word to use to my son, Grandsir!" Her cheeks flamed, her little fair hands shook. "My Henry is, as he says, a Carmichael. No braver clan you'll find in all braid Scotland!" Her gentle voice rose shrill.

"There, my daughter." The old man put her courteously back in her chair. His rugged old face was rather pale. "Be sure I would not miscall our son——"

"But Henry is my son, my own! And I've always been terrified of the sea, and all my folk before me. They tell it of Derek Carmichael, the first earl—" she stopped short. How could she tell that tale of roistering old Derek, with its black, unearthly cli-

max, to this hard-lipped, cold-eyed Puritan? She wilted back in her chair.

"Do not stir yourself so, Diana." Very gently Grandsir laid his big, gaunt hand on her arm. "But—" his shrewd old face grew dulled with heavy question: "But there's never yet Brewster born that did not love the sea. Afraid of the sea!" His hand shook on her arm. "He can't be a Brewster. It—it's not believable!"

The great room echoed with that iron clang of verdict. Cold, hostile eyes stared at the wretched pair. Diana's fair head drooped. Henry set his solid little jaws. His blue eyes focussed on his brand-new morocco boots, and there clung.

Now, out of all that assembly, one Brewster had not yet spoken judgment.

Throned in a great carved blackwood chair before the fire sat Great-grandaunt Joanna Billings Brewster, a tiny, brittle old lady in a plum-colored satin gown. Her small hickory-nut face, criss-crossed by the million wrinkles of ninety years, was framed in a high daunting helmet of frilled Mechlin. Her veiny little hands grasped her tortoise-shell snuff-box as if it were a sceptre. Thin eyelids half-closed, small satin foot meditatively tapping the cross-stitch cat, she had listened in silence. But now she raised her voice. And her household, even to Grandsir Adoniram himself, gave ear as to an oracle.

"I've sat by and harked to your gibble-gabble

quite long enough." Her little cracked voice cheeped high like the last katydid of fall. "And I wash my hands of the whole blethering troop of you. You, Levina, and you, Lysander, and you, too, Adoniram!" She levelled her snuff-box at Grandsir with a menacing click. "Coward, indeed! Brewster blood is Brewster blood. Not one drop ever turned coward, nor ever will. So do ye all stop picking on little Henry. Let me hear no more of this folderol. Brewster blood is Brewster blood, I say. Mind my words. When his time comes, little Henry will not fail."

Uncle Lysander fiddled with his ear-trumpet. Cousin Levina sat back, quenched. Grandsir's iron mouth twitched; his grim eyes smouldered. But Aunt Joanna's word was law and gospel. Not another word did he speak.

The Brewster clan not only ceased their blether, but proceeded to treat Henry and his mother most kindly and hospitably—from a Brewster standpoint. None the less, that first year with his father's people spelled for little Henry misery long drawn out. Eight years old is quite old enough to know torments of self-consciousness, hours of lonely shame. Cousin Levina forever stopped him on the stairs to rap his linty head with a commiserating knuckle. Uncle Lysander growled unceasingly to see him stride down the pebbled walk, his steady blue eyes unwinking against the sun. With impish divination, even his small mates at Miss Chandler's school took

up the cry. "Cowardy, cowardy Carmichael!" they yelped after him. And little Henry, who feared nothing against which he could raise his fists, came home time and again with soundly blacked eyes and disgracefully torn trousers. But Grandsir Adoniram made life harder still. The harsh, silent old man, bereaved of the young captain, his idolized only son, was hungry to his soul for the comradeship of his son's child. Always he longed to wake the sea-love and the sea-lore that must lie hid in the nature of every true Brewster. Clumsy, patient, he made endless overtures. Of Saturday half-holidays he would lead him down Derby Street, stopping into quaint dark shops full of coils of tarry rope and cases of hardtack and heaped sou'westers and murderous whaling gear; then on to India Wharf, to watch an imperial three-master make port, and hear the ancient mariners assembled pass judgment on her lines and speed. Later, he would march him through the great crowded warehouses, fragrant with casks of wine and oils and bales of spices and heaps of rich-scented woods, the very stuff and incense of magic. Shrewdly he would stop a bronzed, keen sailing-master and draw out curt enthralling references to white squalls, and water-spouts, and strange, gay ports where scarlet domes rose above sands yellow as the thick gold of Grandsir's watch-chain. Else he would stop into the warm gloom of the East India Marine Society, and read aloud from musty old log-books, and tell Henry long,

tangled stories. Stories of mutinies, of gray typhoons that lifted the face of the sea round the *Belisarius* in a green solid wall, of flying pirate raids, of riot and blood and treasure. Henry, pugnacious little tyke, gave eager ear to fight and broil. But to tales of the sea he listened in a terror that chilled his little bones. The sea-fear of all the Carmichaels ran in his veins. No magic and mystery of the sea for Henry! Past even those glorious blood-stained decks he saw all the old eerie pictures of kelpie and blind sea-snake and demon, painted from babyhood on his little brain. And, always smiting his memory, the tale of Derek Carmichael, the old earl, flown with insolence and wine, who, standing at the head of his table on a wild March night, had laid a wager to drink a toast with the de'il himself at midnight, off Craggie Reef. And the shuddering legend told how, all night long, his men-at-arms had gathered on the cliff and watched Craggie Reef, far out to sea, blaze with a still and awful fire. There, standing on the topmost steep, old Derek, arm in arm with a black flickering Shape, drank and drank at his impious toast, then would have stepped into his coble and rowed ashore. But that up from the sea rose spectre hands uncounted and dragged him down, down into bottomless deeps, without a sound or cry. But Henry could not tell his fears to Grandsir. And Grandsir could never have understood. To old Adoniram the sea was the sea, comrade, servant, friend. To his great anxious

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love, it was past enduring that his son's child should be cut off from an ocean life. Life ashore was no life at all, merely a wretched crawling on the edge of things. Little Henry must learn that. Unhappily, little Henry seemed doomed never to learn.

"How any Brewster can be such a landlubber! Such a—coward!" Grandsir spoke the hateful word between shut teeth. He watched Henry trudge down the path to meet Persis Stedman and carry her books. "If he had half that child's spirit! But the Stedmans are seafarers, all. No cringing Scotch blood in them."

Henry's friendship with Persis was approved by all the Brewsters. To grown-up eyes, Persis was as saintly a damsel as ever trotted by in pantalets. But, in truth, no more merciless little tease ever breathed. Henry, poor little pig-headed male, tagged her like a fat adoring puppy, and the more he tagged, the more the little witch led him on, only to torment him at the end. "Cowardy, cowardy Carmichael!" From the other children that taunting streel cut deep. But from Persis's rosy mouth, it stabbed.

The year wore on to Indian summer, then hung in that golden balance week on week. Thanksgiving passed without a touch of frost. No such fall was ever known on Cape Ann, declared the wise elders. "A weather-breeder," Grandsir called each tranquil morning. But now it was late December, and still the sun shone pale as through tinted glass, the

marshes over Lynn way were veiled in smoky blue, the silver sky hung close above a dim and silver sea.

"Come, let's us and Davy run down the causeway and play shipwreck," sang out Persis, skipping down the path, just too far ahead for Henry to catch up with dignity. In furry gray pelisse and squirrel cap Persis was elfin; and elfin mischief snapped in her hazel eyes.

"Naw. I got to go home. 'Sides, it's high tide at sunset." Henry scowled. He did not like to play on the causeway. It was round a flooded causeway that old Derek had rowed to meet his doom.

"Phoo, we could run clear to the lighthouse and back before the tide catches us. Scare-cat!"

Henry reddened to his ears. He stalked dumbly ahead.

"We're going to have a Christmas-tree to our house," Persis chanted on.

"Huh, so are we. Bigger'n yours, too. See if it ain't."

"*You* have a Christmas-tree!" Persis's voice pealed with mockery. "*Your* folkses won't never give you a tree. Nor presents neither."

"Will, too!" bragged Henry hotly. "Wait an' see!"

"Won't neither. 'Cause you aren't a real Brewster. 'Cause you're afraid to go to sea. Cowardy, cowardy Carmichael!"

Henry swallowed hard. A red mist flared before his eyes. His fists shot out, but Persis, an adept

in what a later generation would call footwork, flashed past reach. Laughing like a silver chime, she seized her little brother Davy's pudgy paw. The two romped defiantly away down the causeway.

Henry stamped up Grandsir's front steps. If Persis were only a boy, wouldn't he trounce her, though! He banged down the long hall and pushed furiously into the shadowy parlor.

"Mother, I am *too* going to have a Christmas-tree! Ain't I?"

He stopped, startled. Round the fireplace sat the entire Brewster clan. Scarlet-eared, he hastened to make his manners. Uncle Lysander grunted. Cousin Levina tapped his head with a bony finger.

"What's all this touse about a Christmas-tree? We never heard of such trumpery in my day."

"Hey? What? A Christmas-tree?" Uncle Lysander brought his ear-trumpet to bear. "Hoity-toity! Popery. Rank popery. Come New Year's, mebby, I'll have a fire-new shilling for ye. But Christmas—tut, tut!"

"B-but—" Henry swallowed hard again. His small chest swelled.

"Here, in your own country, it is not the custom to observe Christmas, my son." Grandsir Adoniram spoke the final austere decree. "Your own people have never sanctioned such light-minded pastimes."

Henry's mother drooped her fair head. But Henry was past all bounds.

"In my own country we always keep Christmas. My own grandfather always gives a great dinner to everybody, and he gives me presents, and money, and a tree, too. We Carmichaels——"

"Henry!"

At that panic-stricken whisper Henry stopped. But the mischief was done.

"Pray listen, Henry." Grandsir leaned forward on his cane. Under thatched brows his eyes gleamed like live coals. "Understand now, once for all, that you are no longer a Scotsman. Neither are you a Carmichael, save by accident of birth. You are a Brewster. We expect you to comport yourself as Brewsters have always done. Now you may go."

Choking, blistered with mortification, Henry blundered out. It was a pity that he did not pause outside the door. Stiffly erect in her tall chair, needles snapping, beady eyes glittering, Aunt Joanna spoke out her candid mind.

"Passel of hypocrites you are! Pretending to Henry that he dassent even hope for a stick of Christmas candy! When you, Levina, have been knitting him a silk nuby for Sabbath-school; and you, Lysander, ha' got him the finest Barlow knife that money can buy; and you, Adoniram! you've hid away a pair of skates and a double-eagle, days ago!"

Had Henry seen those crestfallen faces he would have forgotten both resentment and awe, and hugged them every one on the spot. Instead, he stood on

the doorstep and ground both fat fists into his eyes. Away to the east, a thickening skein of mist dulled the blue of the sky. Up from the headlands came a faint, low moan; the warning call of the bell-buoy. Down the causeway raced Persis, four-year-old David bumping at her heels. She waved a derisive red-mittened hand.

"Come along! Dare you! Cowardy, cowardy Carmichael!"

Henry's fists balled hard as pebbles. He wheeled on the great lion knocker with a menacing glare. It was as if he hurled his small anathema against all the ranks of Brewsters, past, present, and to come.

"Doggone 'em!" choked Henry's filling throat. "First I'll show Persis. Then I'll show *you!*"

And setting his teeth against the terror that always shook him when he ventured near the sea, he raced off down the causeway.

Grandsir was right at last. This golden autumn was just a weather-breeder. Minute by minute that silken skein of fog crept closer, closer inshore. Minute by minute the sky grew more overcast, the sea more leaden. Soon a black wall piled looming to the zenith. Then the north wind awoke. Shrieking, it whipped the slow incoming tide into white-topped rollers that leaped and raced and thundered. And night and storm shut down on Salem together.

Henry had been given leave to play with his small neighbors till supper-time. Consequently no one

missed him till past dusk. The elder Brewsters were just filing out to their sombre tea, when there came a clang at the knocker, then a sharp, anxious voice. Mrs. Stedman's voice.

"Pompey! Ask your master— Oh, my little daughter, Persis! Is she here, playing with your Henry, captain? And David, my baby! But of course they are here. Although they had no permission to come."

"Persis? David? But Henry is upstairs with his mother, I believe. Learning his catechism."

A flying young step on the stairs. A quick, startled reply.

"No, Grandsir. Henry is not with me. I thought him playing with Persis—Henry!" The scared mother-voice rose piercingly. "Henry, my little son! Hark to the wind! Grandsir! Where can the little fellow be?"

Blandly amused at Henry's unreasoning parent, Grandsir condescended to send his black man-servant in search. A few minutes after, still blandly, he himself put on greatcoat and clogs, took a lantern, and set forth. An hour later, very wet and cold, with both blandness and condescension thoroughly drenched and pounded out of him, he stumbled up the steps and into the hall.

"We—we will have the boy back shortly, Diana, my dear," he announced in a rather uneven voice. "The town is being carefully searched. Diana, my dear daughter! Where are you, child?"

"Diana rushed from the house directly you were gone." Cousin Levina put her hand on his arm. In the candle-light her long yellow face showed a curious ashy pallor. "Most foolish! But we could not stop her. She fled away like a mad woman, crying that the sea had stolen little Henry —that the sea had always hated the Carmichaels, and now the storm had come to snatch away her little son—" Cousin Levina stopped, panting.

"Folly!" Grandsir shrugged off his dripping coat. His hard, wind-beaten face was paler than Cousin Levina's. "As if the boy had not wits to stay out of the surf!"

"But where is he, Adoniram?"

Grandsir looked at her.

"God knows!" he cried in a loud, strange, tearing voice. And coatless, his white head bare, he plunged away into the night.

Eighty years ago. Yet up Salem way you will find more than one aged man who has heard tell of the great storm of '33. No more fearful nor'-easter ever swept the New England coast. Hour after hour the wind went screaming, rain and sleet beat down like whips, the great waves crashed and thundered along the shore. The seas swept every boat in the harbor away. Anchors, ropes, ballast —so many playthings in that tempest's clutch. Three great schooners went ashore at Burkesson Reef, pounded to splinters against those cruel rocks. Not even Salem men—and none braver nor more

sea-wise—dared go to their rescue. In that hell of smother, a life-boat could not live a moment. All night long men and women worked side by side to keep great signal fires ablaze along the shore. All night long all Salem, gentlefolk and factory hands, servants and fishermen, searched for the three lost children. Dour and capable, old Jotham Coleman, mayor of Salem, took the lead. He divided the searchers into squads, and gave each a district of the town. For all the wild night, the confusion, the terror, that search was conducted with grim New England gumption. But two seekers refused to obey orders, and went instead their own stubborn way. One was a white-faced girl, in torn and trailing black. Up and down the narrow dark streets she sped, never once hearing the pitying calls that begged her to stop and wait under shelter, that cried to her assuringly that her boy would soon be found. Always her voice rang high above the storm, frantic, imploring: "Henry! Henry, my precious! Come back to mother, darling! Come back to mother, little son!"

The other searcher was an old man, by far too aged and feeble to face that battering wind. But not a man dared question him. Not one dared urge him to cease his search. Back and forth on the beach he paced, hour on hour, bare-headed, the unlit lantern swinging in his numbed hands. Never once did he glance toward town. Always he stared out to the black tumult that was the sea.

Lamps burned in every room in the Brewster mansion that night. Down in the kitchen the servants gathered, an awed huddle. In the long hall Uncle Lysander paced stumbling up and down. His bony old knees shook under him. His face was chalky and drawn. Now and then he opened the front door and put his trumpet to his dull old ear, as if through the roaring wind he would catch a beloved little voice. Before the parlor fire crouched Cousin Levina. Sternly practical, Cousin Levina had made all ready: blankets, brandy, camphor, hot sand-bags. Now there was nothing left for her hands to do. So she crouched on the tiger-skin before the hearth, her lean hands locked on her lean old breast. And she tried to pray for little Henry's life. But her lips could only whisper, over and over: "Richard's son! Richard's son! Oh, poor Adoniram! Oh, his poor mother! His poor mother!"

In all the great house only one person sat silent and unmoved. Throned in her carved chair, her hands locked on her snuff-box, her small face shut up tight as a sandalwood puzzle, Aunt Joanna sat staring into the fire. Never once did she move. Even when, at midnight, the storm tore the solid oak shutters from the window and sent the whole sash crashing on the floor, she did not stir.

Just before dawn Cousin Levina, creeping restlessly down the hall, saw a gleam of light away at the end of the garden.

"Lysander! Who can be down at the carriage-house?"

No reply. Puzzled, a weak pulse of hope in her veins, she threw on Grandsir's coat and started out. The wind nearly took her off her feet, but she struggled on. At the cedar windbreak, she stopped, appalled. There stood Uncle Lysander, axe in hand, hacking away at a tiny evergreen with all his might.

"Lysander! Have you gone clean cracked? What in time are you doing?"

Lysander grunted. In the gray icy light he turned a sheepish red.

"Needn't come spyin' on me, Levina. Struck me that if—if little Henry comes back—we might's well have a Christmas-tree for him. Seeing he's so set on it——"

"To be sure," Levina choked. Then, trembling, she grasped the top of the tree. "Hoist the other end, Lysander. I'll help you carry it in."

An hour later the daylight had gained and the tide was out, although great seas still foamed over the causeway. A burly sailor stood sighting out toward the ruined lighthouse. Then he held brief confab with the mayor. After which he hailed two of his mates. The three lashed themselves together and started for the lighthouse. Sliding, lunging, step by step, they pushed on through icy knee-deep water till the spindrift blotted them from sight.

The searchers gathered, staring. Wind and hail lashed their faces. The hard spray stung their eyeballs like flakes of fire.

"It's all madness," the mayor shouted in Grandsir's ear. "The children would never run out there to play. But we have searched every hole and corner in Salem. There is no other place left to search."

"Madness indeed," agreed Grandsir. His gray head sagged on his breast. His bloodshot old eyes quivered shut. No, the children would never have gone to play on the causeway. At least, not Henry. For Henry—once more that barbed thought struck deep into Grandsir's sore heart—for little Henry was afraid of the sea.

The minutes dragged on. Not even the keenest sight could make out the lighthouse. For the tide was turning now. Great currents were beating in. Wave on wave broke across the causeway in a blinding rush of foam. Yet, peering against the welter, the weary crowd waited, waited on.

Suddenly the mayor's hand grasped Grandsir's arm.

"They are coming back, captain. Look!"

A roaring wave broke over the causeway, flinging high a curtain of spray. As it fell they glimpsed the foremost sailor, a reeling, stumbling wraith. On swept another great wave. But not until Grandsir had seen.

"Yes, they are coming back. Coleman! In God's

name tell me! I can see no longer. They are carrying—what are they carrying?"

They laid little Henry on the deep settle before the fire, and wrapped his stiff, clay-cold little body in roasting-hot blankets, and forced hot spirits drop by drop between his rigid little jaws. Cousin Levina, gray-lipped, her breath coming in gasps, scurried about with hot bottles and flannel-wrapped flatirons. Uncle Lysander squatted on his creaky old knees and rubbed Henry's icy hands. Grandsir Adoniram tried to help; but, pushed aside by the others, he dragged himself to a corner and huddled there, his hands clenched, his stern mouth set, his eyes bent imploringly on Henry's mother, as if he put all his trust in her frail might. But little Henry's mother never looked his way. Whiter than the little unconscious face on the pillow, she crouched by the settle, holding his small cold feet tight against her breast. Her blue eyes stared straight ahead, blank as blue ice; her beautiful mouth was wrenched awry. Not once in that endless hour, while all the others worked and wailed and clamored, did she speak one word. Only she pressed the little feet closer, closer, as if her burning heart of anguish could warm them back to life.

Now, in the year of our Lord 1833, even as today, a small boy was a being compact of steel wire and whipcord. After a long hideous eternity, a faint red began to warm little Henry's ash-white

cheeks. Half an hour more and he could sit up weakly, his head on his mother's shoulder. And blessedly soon he was sipping hot mulled wine, and answering proud, tearful questions with true Brewster unconcern.

"And so our little Henry saved Persis's life. And Davy's, too," wept Cousin Levina behind her hand-screen. "But the sailors say that they found you all high in the tower, clean above the waves. How could you climb the lighthouse rock? 'Tis smooth as glass."

"I shinned up, marm."

"But how could you drag the other children up, sonny?" quavered Uncle Lysander. " 'Tis steep as a wall!"

"First I h'isted Persis. Then we pulled Davy up between us."

"I dare say. But harkee, Henry." Grandsir Adoniram laid his hand on the little boy's shoulder. His voice was rather hoarse. "First, you put the other children into a safe corner; then you dragged two heavy doors over your hiding-place, so that you were sheltered from the great wind. How were you able to do that?"

"I'd just got to," said Henry patiently. His tired eyes dropped shut. The vain repetitions of his elders were almost past enduring. But Answer up Polite and Speak When You're Spoken To.

However, at that moment Uncle Lysander hobbled importantly from the room, then limped beam-

ing back, dragging the little tree. And with a sharp breath of delight little Henry suddenly sat up.

"It isn't a Christmas-tree, uncle?"

Indeed it was a Christmas-tree, all hastened to assure him. In a trembling fluster Cousin Levina and Uncle Lysander propped the little pine in a great Chinese jar.

"And I've knit you a nuby, and Grandsir's bought you a pair of skates, and you have a parcel of other presents, too. We'll hang them on to-night. And I'll string cranberries and pop-corn, and make rock-candy ropes, and you shall have candles on it, besides!"

Little Henry leaned back with ineffable calm. He was too tired to say much. But such is the unsanctified nature of man that deep in his heart there kindled a warm triumphant glow. A whole tree, all to himself. Wouldn't he crow over Persis to-morrow, though! He smiled gratefully on his assembled serfs. But the three old people hardly dared to look at him. Their old mouths trembled on the words they spoke. Their old hearts were thrashing in their breasts. For this their son, their darling, this treasure unspeakable which was lost to them, was found. This, the hope of their hearts, their one precious torch of life, was lit anew, that they might warm their weary old souls at its dear fire.

Then Henry glanced across the room.

Prim and sedate in her tall chair, sat his great-grandaunt, silent as she had sat the long night

through. Her leaf-brown hands were folded. Her tiny face was inscrutable. But, as she looked across at her small kinsman, in her beady eyes there lit a queer keen flame.

Grandsir Adoniram turned again to Henry. His arm shut covetously round the child.

"You deserve your tree, my son. You have always been afraid of the sea. You did a noble act in risking your life to save a little girl."

Henry eyed him straight and fair. Brewster blood plus Carmichael blood makes for brutal truth.

"No, sir, I never. I didn't run down the causey to save Persis."

"But you knew she was in peril."

"No, sir, I never. But she'd called me names. And I went after her to slap her face for her, good. But she said she was just funning, so I—I didn't. I stayed, and we played pirate. And then the tide came in so quick we didn't dare cross the causey. And that's all."

There was a murmur of disappointment. But out spoke Cousin Levina.

"No matter why you went, Henry, 'twas a brave act. You, so afraid of the sea——"

"*Levina!*"

Cousin Levina jumped and gasped aloud.

On her high throne Grandaunt Joanna sat rigid. But two tiny red spots glowed on her nutcracker cheeks, and her beady eyes were ablaze. She shook

a contemptuous finger at Cousin Levina. Clear, scornful, her piercing voice chirped high.

"Hark, you children. Let us have no more of this gabble. Such a palaver over Henry! Brewster blood, I tell you. Brewster blood did it all. Not a drop of our blood ever turned traitor. Nor ever will. Hear that?"

A sigh of agreement breezed through the room. Aunt Joanna was right, of course. Aunt Joanna, their oracle, was always right. What a superb tribute to little Henry! Proudly their eyes sought his face. Proudly Grandsir patted the small roached head. But, inexplicably, Henry was not responding to that tribute with the respectful gratitude which would become a Brewster. Instead, an angry light kindled in his blue eyes; his face reddened to his hair. He drew a little closer to his mother, that ignoble alien. Then—incredible! Out spoke little Henry, arrogant, unabashed, and sassed Aunt Joanna to her reverend face!

"Brewster blood, nothin'," said blasphemous little Henry. "If I done anything brave, it's 'cause I had Carmichael blood in me. 'Cause I'm my mother's folks, not because I'm a Brewster. There, now!"

There fell the hush that follows cataclysm. Staring, the Brewsters confronted each other, shocked and wan. But Aunt Joanna did not turn an eyelash. A long minute she looked at Henry. Then, very deliberately, snuff-box in hand, she teetered

across the room, her silken gown whispering behind. She bent above the settle and looked hard into that stern, hot, belligerent little face. Then, with a smart click, she brought her snuff-box down on his obstinate little shoulder. And over her wrinkled face came a gleam of purest proud delight.

"So Carmichael blood helped you face the sea all night, little Henry? Um. Mebby. Mebby so. But mark my words, Henry, mark my words. *'Twas only Brewster blood that gave you the pluck to tell me so!*"

And so did Henry Carmichael Brewster receive his accolade.

OF THE MISSISSIPPI COUNTRY

THE RAGGED EDGE OF FORTY

"ANY word from up-river, Molly? Can't you get Cobb's Landing?"

Plastered to his waist with yellow ditch-clay, dripping from head to heel, Jim Stirling stumbled up the rain-swept bank, and into his shack. Molly, bent over piles of time-books and vouchers, lifted a tired, intent face.

"No, dear. Are you expecting a call?"

"Why, I thought I'd told you." Jim frowned, puzzled. "Kirkland—president of the Inter-State, you know—wired that he'd be along on route inspection. He's due at Cobb's Landing this morning. That will bring him here some time to-day."

"Kirkland! The chief! On route inspection!" Molly's brown, clear eyes grew wide with dismay.

"Yes, the Great Mogul himself. Just this contract's luck, for my superior officer to hit camp when blasting and levee fills and all are stopped, dead, by high water. But don't look so distressed, Molly. Can't be helped."

"Maybe the storm will delay him, and things will be in better shape by the time he gets here."

"They couldn't be in worse shape." Grim amusement flickered in Jim's harassed eyes. "I've been hoping with all my soul that Kirkland would rec-

ommend me for the Lake Linden fill. If I could get that two years' work, I'd stand a chance of recouping this year's losses. But when he sees this job in such a ghastly mess—and if it was anybody else on earth but Kirkland! That man doesn't know what ill luck means. He's sixty-five years old, and he's been an engineer since he was twenty, and I don't believe he's fumbled a contract yet."

"I wish you knew when to expect him."

"So do I. But I dare say the wires are all down in this wind. Or else the poles are washed out of root. If this rain keeps on, all southern Illinois will be washed out of root. So will our contract. So will we. But what of that? Merely another failure——"

Stirling shut his teeth. He heaved his big body out of boots and oilskins, and stood staring blankly through the low window. Molly followed her husband's eyes. She saw a flat, gray, miry country; a broad muddy canal, rolling bank-full to the wide, gray river, half a mile below; a string of dingy house-boats, a clutter of barges, a launch or two; and, dwarfing the smaller craft, a gigantic steam-dredge. Its tall, ungainly machinery rose stark as vast sprawling pinions. Its huge bucket scooped up and down, up and down, snatching great gobbets of earth and gravel like the beak of some gigantic bird of prey. Suddenly Molly's mouth quivered. Her eyes fell shut. Week on week, all the winter through, she had looked on that dull, plodding scene.

But never had she seen what she saw to-day. As if written in fire, the words flared out, scorching her tired eyes, her tired brain: "Failure—failure—failure!"

"I don't want to whine, Molly." All his bold, gay confidence had dropped out of Jim's voice. His face, always so unconquerably boyish, was suddenly gaunt and bewildered and old. "But I do feel like a chump. Think of it! Sixteen years at drainage engineering, and not one successful job yet!"

"Your jobs are always successful!" blazed Molly. Her pale face crimsoned. "Your ditches are always cut to grade, and your levees stand, and your berms hold fast. You never signed a contract yet that you didn't put through on honor. Yet you dare pretend that you've failed—" Something gripped her throat. She halted, her cheeks afire, her cold hands trembling. Jim looked at her with heavy eyes.

"You're a good sport, Molly. But I have not made good. You know that. If I were a younger man—but here I am, on the ragged edge of forty, this minute. When a man gets to forty, and hasn't made good—well, he never will make good. That's all."

His voice stopped on a queer gruff note. He stooped and jerked on the big mud-caked boots. "Guess I'll go back. Megaphone me if there's any word from up-river. So long!"

Molly watched him tramp down the oozy bank, then cross the board bridge to the dredge. Her

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cheeks whitened slowly. Her heart pounded heavily, stroke on stroke of pain. "The ragged edge of forty!" Yes, there they both stood, hard on the boundary of middle age. And when you reached forty, yet had not made good——

They had planned it all so differently! Her mind fled back to their first year together. The proud, gay splendor of it! For, boy that he was, Jim had been awarded two large contracts, and he had swung them through superbly. No dreams were too golden for that year to dare! But on the contract following he had barely come out even, because of breakdowns and delays. And the next year's work had put him six thousand dollars in debt. That disaster was never Jim's fault. No man alive could have foreseen the flood that swept out three months' costly labor in a night. And Jim had faced that downfall with royal unconcern. "Don't you care, Molly, you old peach. I'll earn it all back in a jiffy. You'll see!"

Molly had not cared a farthing's worth. Her faith in Jim's powers was a living fire. The ten years of drudgery that followed could not dim that eager flame. She had stood by Jim all the way. She had forced herself to every nettling economy. She had scrimped on herself, she had scrimped on the children, although it hurt her to the quick to deny them. Priscilla, now apple-cheeked eleven, should have begun music lessons long ago. Jim Junior, aged nine, stocky, red-headed, determined,

a mechanical genius like his father, already clamored for a workshop, for tool-kits, "an' a real dynamo, 'cause I want to 'speriment in wireless." And little 'Lizabeth, her baby, her darling! How she longed to deck 'Lizabeth in laces and fine linen, like the wee fairy princess that she was! But toil as Jim might, save as she might, they had never quite fought their way out of debt.

"And by coming down here I have hindered Jim, not helped him," Molly thought. Yet she had come in such loving eagerness to serve! This contract was the digging of a twenty-mile drainage ditch through an isolated farming country. Jim had sublet the work from the Inter-State Engineering Company, taking full charge. That meant, Jim must "live on the work." He must tramp the soggy banks all day, overseeing both levee crews and ditch gangs; he must eat, and sleep, and make up his endless complicated reports in this ten-by-thirty shack, set on the ditch bank, where he could be called with the night shift. Molly, meanwhile, would stay in their quiet home town, and take care of the children, and have her breath and being in the rare Sundays that Jim could spend with her. That was the way, always. An engineer's wife learns to put up with such things. But when the contract began its career of ill fortune Molly had rebelled. She sent the children to her mother. She rented their little home. Then she went straight to Jim, and met his amazed protests with a terse ultimatum.

"No. You'll not send me home. No. I'm not afraid of mosquitoes, nor malaria, nor floods, nor drunken laborers, nor anything else. Yes, I'll manage to amuse myself. I can cook your meals and keep your books and see that you get six hours' sleep and plenty of quinine, if I can't do anything more. I'm here, mind that. And here to stay."

But now, deep in her sore heart, she knew that all her loving care meant nothing to Jim. He was too spent to realize even her dear presence. Never once did he complain of the calamities that each day brought. He pushed on, fighting his losing game with unshaken courage. Until to-day——

A furious pity surged in her breast. She locked her trembling hands. Oh, he must make good! He *must!* Not just for his own standing. Not just for her and for those darling cormorants at home. But for his own dear precious sake. For sake of his challenged soul; for sake of his sweet and confident spirit, that had never faltered until to-day.

"I won't stand it, to see him suffer. I *can't!*" She was sobbing now, uncontrollably. Her slim body swayed against the door. "It isn't fair! Oh——!"

The telephone rang sharply. Startled, she ran to the desk.

The receiver was a blur of rushing sound. At last a deep voice boomed through the clamor.

"Hello! This the Contract Camp? Well, I want Stirling. Oh, this is Mrs. Stirling? Good morning,

madam. This is Kirkland speaking. Will you kindly tell Mr. Stirling that I expect to reach camp in my launch by five P.M.? Mrs. Kirkland is with me——"

Click! Then silence. Molly put up the receiver with shaky hands.

"So Kirkland, the Great, is coming, in the midst of this flood. So Jim's chief will inspect the contract at its very worst. And Mrs. Kirkland! She's the sort that's used to roughing it, of course—in Adirondack camps, with marble baths and eight servants. Well, if they stay the night, they can take our bedroom. Jim can sleep here on a cot and I'll manage with the hammock. As to meals, they'll have to eat what I can find in this wilderness. They sha'n't starve, anyhow. Here goes!"

She megaphoned her news to the dredge, then set swiftly to work. The tiny shack was always in flawless order. But to make ready a company dinner on two hours' notice, twelve miry miles from even a country grocer's, and over a crotchety two-burner gasolene stove!

Back and forth flew Molly, shuttling from piano-box kitchen to wee, crammed living-room. She set out the dainty linen and silver that she had brought to make the shack homey for Jim; Heaven be praised, there were enough spoons to go round! She planned and cooked the simple meal with the deftness of an artist. But all the fiends of mischance attended her. The ice-pick had vanished off the face of the earth. The oven door-knob whirled loose at every touch.

The canned peas were savorless, the cream was dolorously thin. The chicken, sent down from a neighboring farm, proved a muscled ancient, thewed like a Spartan bull. The evil stove first smoked, then scorched, then blew up like a giant fire-cracker, burning the biscuits to ashes and filling the house with oily smoke. Molly had barely rescued the potatoes when she heard the shrill whistle of a launch signalling from the river. Through the thick mist she saw a trig white motor-boat, flying a blue ensign, steer into the mouth of the canal. The Kirkland launch, of course! Breathless and scarlet-cheeked, Molly rushed to her cubby bedroom, twisted up her hair, and flung on a fresh dress. Her hands snatched frantically at hooks that caught in hair and laces, at eyes that burrowed, demoniac. Her lashes glittered with tears of angry shame. Were she and Jim young folk, just starting out, this haphazard entertaining would be all very well. But at forty to pretend a bland Bohemianism, to welcome your guests in a yellow pine shack, to offer them the meal that your own hot blundering hands have prepared—ah, that's another story!

The white launch swung alongside. At the bow stood Jim, taller and more gaunt than ever beside the huge, stocky, gray-haired man at his elbow. From the cabin emerged a plump, rosy, gray-haired lady, in impeccable tweeds and storm-coat. As in a dream, Molly heard herself greeting her guests with feverish welcome. A desperate desire seized her

to make this forlorn hour a success at whatever cost. She led the way into the smoky living-room with laughing aplomb. She met Jim's blank eyes with glowing reassurance. But Jim did not seem to see her. He did not seem to see anything. His face was a mask of utter weariness.

The dinner, at last on the table, proved hot and eatable, at least in spots. The storm had risen to a gale now. Rain and sleet dashed on the low windows. The flimsy shack rocked under the heaving shoulder of the wind. Molly drew a deep breath. Small and bare as the shack might be, her guests were surely more comfortable than in their damp, close cabin. She smiled at Jim again. He did not see her. He sat hunched at the foot of the table, barely tasting his food. His face was gray and lifeless. His fine, boyishly clear features looked blurred and dull, ground down by the attrition of defeat. Molly put down her fork. The food choked her. But pluckily, gayly, she chatted on.

"It's too pitch-dark and stormy to wallow round these ditches," said the chief, pushing back his chair. As he stood up, his tall, ponderous figure dwarfed the little room. His broad face dropped into grave, calculating lines. "And I've got to be in St. Louis to-morrow, so Mrs. Kirkland and I must catch the midnight train out of Cobb's Landing. So, Stirling, you must give me an idea how things stand. If you ladies will excuse us, we'll get to work right now."

Jim was already opening his desk. The two men

bent at once to their task. Molly silently cleared the table. Then she sat down beside Mrs. Kirkland, who had settled herself by a lamp, and drawn a handful of crochet from her gold bag. They did not try to talk. Even their quiet voices might disturb the men. Mrs. Kirkland seemed to accept the situation with the unconcern of a familiar experience. Her plump white hands, flashing with superb diamonds and emeralds, shaped small, lumpy Irish-crochet rosebuds with rapid skill. Her round, peony-pink face, under smartly coiffed gray hair, shone with an inimitable contentment. It was all written there, her whole placid story; her well-fed healthy body; her solid assured sense of superior possessions, an established place in life; her profound satisfaction with her own mate, her own self, even her own deep inward being.

Molly studied her absently. In her sore heart a slow rage kindled. Motherwise, Mrs. Kirkland had already talked of her children; her three "girls," all married, and married, Molly perceived, exceedingly well; her sons, who had gone through Harvard and Tech, with leisurely vacations abroad, and were now well started, each on his broad, prosperous highroad. Molly's lips set. Before her aching eyes swam Priscilla's small, impish, lovely face; then Jim Junior's sober little countenance; then baby 'Lizabeth's face, so near! She could feel 'Lizabeth's pussywillow cheek against her own, the soft brush of her downy gold hair, the tight clasp of her strong baby

arms. An angry sob rose in her throat. Oh, this other woman, and her great successful brute of a man! Why must they command every comfort and delight to lavish on their children, while Jim and she, for all their slaving toil, could not dare to spend a dollar, beyond their absolute needs!

She looked across at Jim's haggard, absorbed face. Unconsciously she stretched out her hand to him. Never had she felt more passionately one with her husband. Yet never in her life had she felt so cruelly alone. For all Jim knew of the misery that was consuming her, he might have stood across the gulfs of the universe.

"Um! Guess I've got the hang of this thing now." The chief spoke very low; yet his deep, booming voice filled the little room with grim reverberations. "Your October estimates didn't pan out because of the coal strike. So the dredges earned only twelve hundred dollars that month. Didn't half cover running expenses. And November fell short because that fool dredge-runner smashed your hoisting gear for you. That set you back two solid weeks. By George, that was hard luck! Why didn't you hustle down to St. Louis and lease another dredge, while your gear was being rebuilt?"

Molly flinched. Over Jim's face burnt a slow scorching red.

"Hadn't the funds just then, sir. You know you can't lease a two-yard dredge under four hundred a week."

"Oh! I see." The chief slowly nodded his grizzled head. "That's the mischief of subletting when a man hasn't adequate capital." His words were merciless, yet his slow thinking voice was so completely impersonal that they carried no sting. "Then in December the railroad company got out their injunction, and held you up for five days."

"Yes."

"And in January and February, the great thaw ruined a lot of your levee-work. Then came high water; it has blocked the whole job ever since. And you've used up your margins of time and funds and supplies. In the end, you'll be lucky if you don't come out six or eight thousand behind. By George, it's tough!" The chief lunged to his feet. He stared down at the ruck of papers; he stared at Jim's gray, moveless face. Molly quivered. The chief's words had fallen on her like so many clean blows. She wanted to run to her husband and put her arms around him, and hide that dear sunken head against her breast. Yet, curiously, she felt no anger toward the chief. Hot partisan though she was, she knew that he was never blaming Jim. He was merely summing it all up: strikes, breakdowns, the whole implacable account. And now, like a wise old surgeon, having spoken his diagnosis, he looked at Jim from under hooded brows, and waited.

"You've put it in a nutshell." Jim spoke at last in a queer flat voice. "I've met up with more mishaps than a man of my limited means can cope with.

However, sir, I can assure you that your company shall not be embarrassed by my difficulties."

"Humph, I'm not giving that a thought. But it's a sick outlook for you. Six months more work on this God-forsaken ditch, with only the chance of breaking even to look forward to!"

"I can face that, all right." The harsh red deepened in Jim's face. "But I—I'd particularly hoped that I'd make good on this job. To be employed by your company has been a great satisfaction. I'd even hoped——"

He stopped short. His eyes fell. Molly could finish that sentence. The Lake Linden fill, his longed-for chance! If only——

"Um! Guess I understand, Stirling." Kirkland stared at the black oblong of the uncurtained window. His great bull head stooped; his gray eyes lit with a curious absent glow. It was as if he stared away, past the low room, past the dingy fleet outside, the storm-tossed woods, the dark, brimming river, away across the miles, across the years. "Yes. I understand, all right. Lord, when I remember! Twenty-six years ago it is, this very month——"

He halted. His eyes turned from that black pane to his wife's calm, rosy face, her fair, plump hands, still at their interminable crochet.

"Twenty-six years ago, this month. Remember, Louisa?" The chief's eyes deepened with that queer reflective gleam. "And just such weather as this. Rain and fog and mud, strikes and freshets

and smashups—by George, Stirling, what's all that racket? Hark!"

There was a rush of feet on the steps, then a crashing knock, a high, excited shout.

"Mister Stirling, sir! Open the door. Quick!"

Molly and Jim sprang to the door. On the threshold stood Finnegan, the night watchman. He waved his smoking lantern in their faces.

"My God, sir! Come quick! Hurry! The dredge has sprung a leak!"

"The dredge! Not the big dredge, Finnegan!"

"Yes, sir, the big dredge, down to the river. An' she's sinkin' fast."

"Call the crews. Hurry!" Jim thrust the megaphone into his hands, then turned to snatch up boots and slicker.

"Call the crews, is it? When you laid the men off because of the storm, they lit out for the village, every mother's son of 'em. There's not a soul left on the boats but McCarthy and me. We've been tryin' to make fast her moorings, but in this storm we can't handle the hawsers. An' the current jerkin' her like wild horses, an'——"

But Jim and the chief had already seized lanterns and were pelting off down the bank. Molly stood motionless, gaping after them.

"Wake up, child!" A plump hand gripped her shoulder and shook her vigorously. "Come along!"

Mrs. Kirkland was thrusting her crochet into the bag. Her calm eyes flashed; her placid, imperious

voice rang high. "Don't look so dazed, girl! Get into boots and knickers, if you have 'em, and be spry. Give me some pins, please!" Deftly she kilted her tweed skirts to her knees, and pulled on her own high boots. She wound a scarf over Molly's head, hustled her into a cloak, snatched the overshoes from her limp hands, knelt and tugged them on. "Tut, tut! Don't look so white. Yes, I guess *I* know what it means to lose a dredge! Right in the midst of a contract, too. But we're not going to lose this dredge, d'you hear me? Come, now!"

She seized Molly's arm and dragged her down the steps. Slipping, splashing, they floundered on in the wake of the men with their lanterns. Narrow tilting planks bridged the canal from shore to tow-boat. From tow-boat to river-bank hung a swaying rope-and-board footway, then more dizzy planks to the dredge. Mrs. Kirkland fled across them with the speed of light. Molly staggered behind. The men were already aboard the dredge. Jim had taken command. Jim was always good in emergencies.

"She's sprung an ugly leak astern. Maybe more than one. She's sunk a foot, so far. We have only four men, all told. Molly! Go telephone Cobb's Landing, and get Jacobs and Smith and all the men you can reach, and tell 'em to hike down. Double-quick!"

"Sure, sir, in this storm and dark, it'll take 'em two hours to get here."

"That's a fact. By that time——"

Jim stopped. Beneath their feet sounded a faint, ominous sucking.

"By that time this boat will sink to engine-room level." The chief's voice boomed out inexorably. "We four must get busy and patch up a bulkhead. But meanwhile she's shipping water every second. And no steam up for the pumps. Two of us must man the hand-pumps, to keep her from sinking any deeper. The other two——"

"Nonsense. All four of you go to work on your bulkheading. Mrs. Stirling and I will take the pumps. Get to work, now. Right away!"

Mrs. Kirkland pushed forward into the ring of light. She threw the wet coat from her shoulders. Her big jewelled hands flashed as she lifted them to her head. Her full pink face flushed crimson.

"You, Louisa!" sputtered the chief. Then he glared at her. "You two women can never handle one pump, let alone two. Go back to the cabin. both of you. This is no place for you."

"That'll do, John Kirkland." Mrs. Kirkland's blue eyes snapped. She rolled up her long silk sleeves. "We two can handle the pumps an hour, anyhow. Hoots, Mr. Stirling, what's a drop of rain? We're neither sugar nor salt. That's a-plenty arguing, John. Haven't I done enough worse work than this in my day? Mind the *Miami?* H'm, I thought so. Now, watchman, haul out the pumps. I'll help you shove them into the hatch. And you men get to work on that bulkhead. Hear me?"

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It seemed to Molly that they two had stood a black eternity at the tall iron pumps, their hands gripped over the rusty handles, their bodies wrenched and jolted by the powerful recoil. Bilge-water splashed at their feet. Rain and wind beat in their faces. Jim had turned on the big search-light. In its white glare the dark, hurrying river, the huddled boats, the swaying, leafless trees, stood out stark and clear, weird as an abandoned world. From below came the noise of hammers, the chief's booming voice, Jim's sharp, infrequent orders. And from below came always the churning splash of the pistons, the faint, rhythmic shudder of the hull, that slow tremor that told of the powerful currents dragging always at the weakened keel.

Mrs. Kirkland's fighting blood was up. Her big arms pulled and jerked like clock-work; her round face burned scarlet. Beads of sweat mingled with the raindrops on her forehead. She worked like a splendid old Amazon. Molly never looked her way. Her face was drained and bloodless. She hauled and tugged at her pump like a mad thing. Her body clung against the handle, rose with it, pitched back, as if one with its mechanism. Whirling through her brain in crazy pulses of terror flamed the one hideous thought: if the men couldn't stop that leak—if the pumps failed to clear the hold—if the dredge must sink, after all— Well, it would mean not just loss, not just failure. It would wreck this contract. It would open a pit of ruin beneath their feet.

"But we must save the dredge! We must. We *must!*" The words came soundlessly from her ashen lips. Her head swimming, her breath coming in great anguished gasps, she drove at the pump with all her strength. One moment the children's faces glimmered before her eyes. For the babies' sake—and yet, how little the babies counted! No, for Jim's sake, alone, they must not fail.

The pumps moved more heavily now. The water swashed in a lessening stream. Molly looked at it in a sudden puzzled relief. Less water in the hold. That meant the leak was already under control. Then out rang a yell of satisfaction, and up through a hatch shot Finnegan, sooty as a gnome, his face shining through the grime.

"Saints be praised, 'twas but one bad leak, after all, ma'am! And we finished bulkheadin' this minute. Do you give me that pump, now. I'll clear out what little bilge there is left."

"Yes, and give me a hand there, Louisa." The chief emerged from the hatch, sweaty and beaming. "Congratulations, Mrs. Stirling. You folks won't lose your dredge after all. Though two hours ago it looked a mighty slim chance. But your husband was equal to the crisis. He has put in as tidy a first-aid bulkhead as I ever laid eyes on." He turned to clap Jim heartily on the shoulder. "Good work, man. Now, Louisa! Give me that pump."

"In a minute——"

"Right away. By George, but you're a sight, my dear! Look at your hair!"

"My hair? Good gracious!" All the Amazon went out of Mrs. Kirkland. As a bride suddenly aware of her man's presence, she twisted up her wet straggled locks, and hurriedly retied her veil. With Finnegan's lantern dancing ahead, the four tramped back, across the plank bridges, up the bank to the shack. The chief and his wife laughed and joked, in fine fettle. To them, Molly thought drearily, these two bitter hours had been rather a frolic. But she and Jim could not exult with them. That dusk wing of calamity had brushed too close. They had not conquered. They had merely escaped. And who could tell how soon those patched timbers might yield again to the thrusting current? How dared they dream of safety, even for an hour?

Back at the cabin, Jim mended the fire, while Molly rummaged out dry clothes for Mrs. Kirkland, and heated some bouillon. It was nearing midnight. The Kirklands must be off in half an hour, to make their train.

The chief stood steaming by the fire, bouillon cup in hand. Suddenly he turned his head, and stared again at the dark little window. Again Molly's glance was caught by the strange, grave brooding look in his eyes. He seemed to look away, past them all, past the very night itself. Then he turned. Again his eyes bent deeply on the face of his wife.

"Just such a night as this, just such a smash-up."

His deep voice boomed out the words. "Takes us back a good many years, Louisa?"

Mrs. Kirkland looked up swiftly. Over her calm face glinted a flash of memory: the gleam of a remembered terror.

"I rather guess it does take us back." Her full throat quivered with a shaken breath. "Just such times as this we had, twenty-six years ago, that whole hateful contract at Alton. My, how did we live and stand it?"

"Mind the night our own dredge sank? When we were within five hundred feet of finishing our main cut? By George!" He glanced at Jim, shrunken in his chair. "Turns me sick and chilly to remember it. You see, our company—that was Louisa and me—owned only one dredge in those days. Just half paid for, at that. Only thing on earth we did own, mind you. Mind how we all pitched into that bulkheading? But no use. She sank so fast, we might as well a' tried to patch her with egg-shells."

"I wasn't on the contract just then, dear. You forget. That was when Ned was just a tiny baby, and I was staying at mother's. But I was with you a month later, when the towboat caught fire. Remember?"

"I reckon I do remember. And you nearly broke your back, carrying sand to smother it." The chief nodded grimly. "We'd never saved that tow-boat if it hadn't been for you. You were awake, tending little Ned, and you saw the light, and gave the alarm.

As it was, that fire set us back so badly that we were penalized eight days. At a hundred dollars a day. By *George!*" The chief threw back his big shoulders as if he would throw off an intolerable weight. His hooded eyes flamed. "We were stone broke. The contract had cleaned us out as neat as a whistle. So I had to take that eight hundred out of my life insurance. Lord! No eight hundred in this world can ever look as big to me again. Drawing that check hurt worse than drawing teeth. And the year after, when I hadn't any contract at all, and prowled around idle all year, and you and little Ned had to go home to your mother's—that was tougher yet."

He fell silent. His face darkened, as if the shadow of that dark year drifted past, a hovering menace still.

"You did all any man could, John Kirkland." His wife set down her cup. Her calm eyes flashed. "You kept books, and did odd jobs of draughting, and even went as foreman of a bridge gang, anything to keep us going. It wasn't John's fault, anyway, that we got such a late start." She wheeled belligerently on her hosts. Her voice rang in high defense. "John was a splendid engineer. Everybody knows that. But we'd married young, and we had a houseful of babies before he'd saved up enough to buy his first dredging fleet. After that, every contract he was awarded brought disaster. Nine years of high water and cave-ins and wreck and fire! No man alive can beat that. We were both past forty before we got

out of debt, even. And the children all growing so fast, and needing things, and all! Yes, we made a late start. And we had a long, hard pull. But John won out. I always knew he would."

Her eyes met the chief's. Molly saw that long deep understanding look. A warm little thrill stirred in Molly's heart. Unconsciously she drew nearer.

"We won out together, you mean. It was mostly your doing, Louisa. And it was a long pull, all right. You better believe, we know what a job like this one means!" Again he looked at the dusky window. It was as if his slow gaze looked past the darkness, down the long canal with its treacherous banks, its maddening seeps and slides; down the river shore at the crowded barges; on to the great wounded dredge, plunging on her moorings in the rough water, her patched hull so terribly frail a sheath for the precious machinery. "Yes. We've gone the whole infernal road." He halted: then his voice took on a new significant ring. "That's one reason I decided that our company won't sublet any more contracts. If a job succeeds, we fellows who back it ought to get a bigger slice. If it fails, that smashing big loss avalanches down on one man. So, after this year, we run the work ourselves. On salaries, not percentages."

Molly frowned. For a minute, she did not understand. But not a glimmer of expression crossed Jim's face. For Jim, every word had driven home. No more subletting! Then, no more chances with

the Inter-State people! Well, it was very decent of the chief to let him down in this quiet, offhand way. Of course all his casual sentences meant but one thing: that his work for the Inter-State had been a failure; an abject failure. He could ask no more consideration. He had been given his big chance, and he had fumbled it, that was all.

Yes, the chief had been mighty square. But—with no more contracts from the Inter-State, with no chance of retrieval——

Jim's head sank on his breast. The cabin darkened slowly round him. An icy chill crept through his veins. No use—no chance——

And then it came to him, slowly, that the chief was speaking again. And his words flared through that stifling murk, incredible, ablaze:

"Of course we'll want to employ topnotch engineers. Especially on the Lake Linden fill. It's going to be a stiff one, all right. Only a top-notch man can swing it. So, Mr. Stirling, if you have no other plans for next year, I hope you will take us into account."

There was a pause. Neither Jim nor Molly stirred. Molly's dazed eyes lit with wonder. But a deep flush rose in Jim's haggard face, as if the very fire of life was pouring back into his numbed veins.

"We're offering six thousand salary, and all expenses, of course. With a bonus for every day you finish ahead of time. Personally, I'd like to see Mrs. Stirling here, on your staff." He bowed to Molly;

his hooded eyes lit with a friendly sparkle. "She'd be a valuable first-mate. Just as Mrs. Kirkland was for me. Though you'd swing the job easy enough, all right."

"I'm not so dead sure of that," Jim mumbled, at last. His mouth was so parched, he could hardly speak. The narrow dull room blazed before his eyes, rang as with the blast of trumpets. The Lake Linden fill! Salary six thousand—dizzily he began to count. Six thousand dollars! He could wipe out his worst debts. He could pay for Priscilla's music lessons, and Jim Junior's tool-house, and a new dining-room rug. He could get his head above water. "Only a top-notcher can swing it—" an hysterical chuckle shook him. He a top-notcher! He, with all his failures spread out on the miry ditch before him!

"Yes. You'll swing it, if anybody can." The chief's deep voice pondered on. "Though, if we should meet up with such a mess of ruination as you've just weathered on this contract, I'd be glad to know that things were in your hands. You don't lose your nerve. No matter how bad the smash-up, you'd always hang on and save the pieces."

"Yes. I'd try to save the pieces." But there was no misgiving in Jim's voice. Through him, thrill on thrill, urged the splendid certainty of success.

"Mercy, John, look at the clock! We must start this minute, to make that train." With true womanly hen-terror of being left behind, Mrs. Kirkland ran to the door. "Oh, there are the launch-lights, now!"

Molly helped her into her wraps. Molly's cheeks were scarlet now, her eyes glowed, brown stars. Triumph was calling high in Molly's heart, too.

With much cajolery Jim and the chief helped Mrs. Kirkland inch by inch down the gangway and aboard the launch. Two hours ago she had skimmed across wet six-inch planks like Atalanta. But now she teetered and twittered and narrowly escaped spilling all three into the canal. Lastly, Jim ran back for her forgotten Irish crochet. Molly crammed it into his hand without looking up. Nor did Jim dare look Molly's way. Had their eyes met, undoubtedly both would have exploded on the spot.

Lantern in hand, Jim waited till the red and green lights vanished past the river bend. Then he went back to the shack.

"Well, old lady?"

"Well, Jim?"

Molly was busily covering the fire. Sheer delight had overflowed Molly's plucky heart. That high tide brimmed and blinded in her happy eyes. She knelt, industriously punching, as if she would punch back the betraying choke in her voice. "W-well, Jim?"

No reply, save a gasp and a thud.

She turned, startled.

Once more, the eternal small boy had bobbed up in Jim. No wonder there was no sound out of him! Eyes popping, forehead bursting crimson, he was turning solemn ecstatic handsprings across the floor.

"*Jimmy!*" Molly sobbed out, then, a wild, pre-

posterous cackle of alarm and temper and delight. "Of all the kid tricks! And both of us on the ragged edge of forty, this minute! For shame!"

Deliberately Jim reversed himself to a more conventional attitude. There was no cloud of shame upon his radiant face. In these twenty minutes he had thrown off twenty years. To Molly's shining eyes he was her boy again, daring, insolent, adorable.

"Ragged edge of forty, or ragged edge of nothin', who cares?" He bent to Molly swiftly. And the splendid hope in his glowing face made her heart leap. "You old peach! What do I care, if I'm standing on the ragged edge of blazes—so long as you're standing by?"

RAW PROSE

HOLLIDAY, Ward County, Illinois, is famed far and wide as the Morning Glory Coal Stove Town. It is a grimy, thriving place, not far north of St. Louis. Its railroad yards and foundries sprawl along the hot, dusty levee, but its "residential section" perches haughtily atop the steep limestone bluffs, well out of the smoke and clamor below. It is a new town, barely twelve years old, and its smart toy churches and trim toy bungalows, set in baked clay lawns, might have been dumped from his vasty pinafore two minutes ago by some Titan baby. Not much romance there. Nor can the foundries, squatting in dingy ranks along the Mississippi shore, lay claim to charm. As for the great bluffs, on whose arched heights the Piasa spread its blood-red wings a century gone, their noble ramparts have been hacked and seamed by scrapers, and plastered with bill-boards, and strung with wires and cables. But midway up the face of the highest bluff runs a narrow shelf, reached by a long flight of steps, hewed into solid rock. It is a very tiny shelf, a mere wrinkle on the great face of the bluff; and on it there clings, like a swallow's nest, a single tiny shack; just a heap of plank, huddled tight against the steep rock wall. That June, its rough boards were hid under showers of silvery clematis vines, and tossing sprays

of honeysuckle. Hanging against that sheer rock, sheathed in bloom, the little house had a quaint air of being swung there by some breezy magic—a pixy dwelling, blown between twilight and dawn. Above and beneath that small blossoming foothold of enchantment, Holliday spreads a frank and dismal front, all jerry-built smartness above, all noise and glare below. As young Mrs. Burton sadly says, her husband may praise Holliday as a factory site as long as he pleases, but there's no blinking the fact that Holliday is writ in prose. Raw prose, at that.

Its prose bore hard on Mrs. Burton that warm morning. She had just settled herself and her embroidery on the porch for a long peaceful day when Lika called her to the telephone. There her husband's voice announced disturbing news. He would bring a guest to luncheon, a most portentous guest—no less a personage than Mr. Channing of Boston, chief stockholder in the Burton Stove Foundry. Matters had not gone well with the Burton plant that year. Business was slack, labor high. Mr. Channing of Boston was known as a connoisseur of sixteenth-century enamels, and, too, as a broad-minded investor. Hence the mingling of worry and keen hope in Mr. Burton's tired voice. But Mrs. Burton sighed. Just like John, to bring home company on the hottest day of the year. And such company! Mrs. Burton looked out on her scorched garden, where a few lank geraniums drooped their homesick heads. She looked within, at her crowded little house, its stuffy dining-

room, its forlorn cockiness, and shed a few injured tears. Then she called Lika and set sulkily to work.

Lika followed her orders with dull obedience. She was a big, fair, sumptuous young creature, with a velvet white-rose skin, and a beautiful grave face, framed in thick braids of wheat-gold hair, and blue, deep eyes, unflinching as the eyes of a child, but clouded nowadays with dusk, stormy shadows. She was an excellent servant. Through the first year Mrs. Burton had exulted in her treasure. But of late, Lika had changed amazingly. Not that she neglected her work. Rather, she slaved at it, with a sort of fury. But all her fine deftness had deserted her. She blundered about like a woman suddenly gone blind. Back of her stupidity there flashed and darkened a sinister gleam. To-day, as she stood, hands clasped, listening dutifully, she was like a creature possessed by some consuming inward fire. Deep crimson spots burned in her cheeks; her blue eyes glittered; her soft mouth shut in a bitter line.

Making ready that majestical luncheon in two hot, scurrying hours was a hideous task. But once at table Mrs. Burton's strained nerves relaxed. Their august guest proved a mild middle-aged gentleman, who ate largely and chatted with urbane enjoyment. Mr. Channing of Boston was a connoisseur of other things besides sixteenth-century enamels and stove foundries. His keen eyes lost no shade of the sordid little comedy staged before him: the scrambling, noisy new town; the worn, harassed man; the wife, young,

pretty, petulant, one moment chattering of her gay acquaintance "in the East," then stopping short, flushed and angrily chagrined, before some trifling slip in the order of her table; then the curious, all-but-visible cloud of rancor that hung between husband and wife; hostile affection; resentment mixed with the vague contempt of the woman who feels herself quite too fine a fibre for her plodding mate. It was all very amusing, a bit pitiful, perhaps; but he had seen it all so often! Then his glance swerved from his hostess's face to the face of the tall girl standing behind her chair, and the connoisseur in him felt a rare thrill. His fine mouth twitched at the crisp paradoxes of his native land. That this rare challenging beauty should stand, like a young empress in chains, at common little Mrs. Burton's common little table! He glanced after her as he lit his cigarette.

"What an amazing type!" Very suavely he took the artist's warrant. "Not American-born, surely? She makes me think of an Alpine meadow, very high, and sunlit, and cold. But clouded like an Alpine meadow under coming storm. Such a face of tragedy, for all its youth! Like having Melpomene herself to pass the biscuit, eh?"

Mrs. Burton frowned. She was not just sure who Melpomene was, anyway. But her husband clutched at this straw of talk.

"Tragic? Um. There's a story back of that tragic face, all right. She came out from Sweden two years ago; brought along her old grandmother, a little

warped old crone, past ninety, they say. They live in that swallows' nest of a shack that hangs against the bluff, maybe sixty feet straight down. You noticed it? All over vines it is, and looks no bigger than your hand. It's a weird place to live, stuck up on that shelf, with no way to reach it except by those endless rock stairs. But Lika dotes on the place. She goes home to the old woman every night. Tends her very faithfully, they say."

"Quite too faithfully." Mrs. Burton spoke with emphasis. "Lika is most unreasonable! The poor old soul would be far better off in a Home. But Lika just smiles when I tell her so. And the absurd way she indulges her! One of the old woman's whims is that she must always have a baby to fuss over. She's pitiably childish, you know. So every day, when her noon work is done, Lika trudges away down the hill to the Finnegan shanty, 'way off beyond the freight-yards, and borrows Mrs. Finnegan's youngest, and carries it home, all the way up those steep, dizzy stairs, for her grandmother to play with. Then, right after supper, she goes home again, gets the baby, and carries it down to its mother. Of all preposterous things!"

Mr. Channing smiled.

"So an ancestress wins her devotion. With all that loveliness, why not a lover?"

"Well, there is a lover. More'n one of him." The host took up his tale. "The whole works went wild over her from the start. 'Specially two of our best

men: Barney Harrigan, a young engineer down at my own factory—a bully good engineer he is, too, and as fine, clean, two-fisted a young husky as ever trod shoe-leather; and Jim MacLaren, the foreman at Foundry A. MacLaren is the older; he's a tremendous swell on the works. Big, swaggering chap; diamond scarf-pin, pockets full of ready money, a bit of a blow—you know the breed. Most of us bet on MacLaren, and it was nip and tuck for a while, but all of a sudden Lika swung over to Barney, and she's never had eyes for MacLaren since. They were engaged, right off the bat. Happy? Say, it did you good to see those two kids strut around together. They figured that they could save up enough to marry in two years, and they thought they owned the earth. Then, six months ago, came bad news. Francis Harrigan, Barney's kid brother, must get into a shooting scrape down in West Virginia. Time of that wretched Paint Creek strike, you remember. I never saw the like of Barney's rage. He went right up in the air. Chucked his job, and lit out hot-foot for Paint Creek, swearing he'd smash the jail open, then smash the Kanawha Company, lock, stock, and barrel. But once out of Holliday, not one word has come from him. He's vanished into thin air. Yes, of course, I've made inquiries. I was right fond of the boy. All I could learn was that his brother had died in jail, just after sending for Barney. But Barney has disappeared as utterly as if he'd stepped off the edge of the earth."

"Curious."

"Worse than curious. It's no' canny. Nowadays Jim MacLaren is hanging round Lika again. Don't believe she looks at him, though. However, he and another man went down to St. Louis last month, and came back with a queer tale. Swore they saw Barney Harrigan in the flesh, his very self. Out at Hilton Park, of a Sunday afternoon, they declared, with a—a woman. Said he wouldn't look their way, and when they hailed him he pretended not to know them. I couldn't quite swallow that yarn. Barney had promised me that he'd come back to his job the minute he got Francis out of jail. Then, considering the girl—no, I don't believe MacLaren's little story for a cent. But the pity of it is, Lika does believe it. And it has clean knocked her out."

"Well, but she doesn't grieve, really," Mrs. Burton broke in. "She never says one word. Swedes are so callous! She does nothing but stumble and blunder around my house all day, then sit in her cottage and embroider all night, making the most wonderful flowers and scrolls on a great piece of handwove linen. You wouldn't think she'd have the *heart* for fancy-work! However, it's marvellous needle-work, though I can't imagine what it's for. But when I asked her if she didn't want to make me some doilies she just smiled and didn't answer. She—oh, yes, Lika, take the tray. Bring some more matches, please."

Lika brought the matches. Her blue eyes shone dark as the sea beneath a beating wind. Her big,

strong hands were willing, as always, yet curiously slow—slow as if the pulse of life had fallen to ashes in that fair, vigorous flesh.

"Melpomene, wearied," smiled the connoisseur, and put down his cup. Then the bland amateur retreated before the man of business, prudent, keen. "As our time is so short, Mr. Burton, perhaps Mrs. Burton will permit us to descend to our own base affairs? Your gross output, I understand, has increased a third since you took over the plant. But your running expenses——"

Lika washed her mountain-piles of dishes, and put her kitchen in order, moving slowly, as if in a tired dream. She was hanging up the last tea-towel when there came a rap at the door. She stood, imperially quiet, and looked at the man on the threshold.

"Good afternoon, Miss Lika." MacLaren's broad, handsome, high-colored face flushed more deeply. He jerked off his cap with a flourish. He towered before her, broad-shouldered, superbly built, powerful as one of his own dynamos.

Lika did not speak. She did not lift her eyes.

"Good afternoon, I say. I just dropped in to ask ye to go with me to the Owls' dance to-night. I'll be pleased to be your company."

Lika gave him an awkward courtesy.

"I tank you. I do not wish to go."

"You don't want to go? Come off. You're kiddin'. A pretty girl like you to mope always at home!"

Lika looked past him, down at the smoky ranks of factories, the wide river below, a sheet of molten brass under the westering sun.

MacLaren frowned. His manner veered from gallant to bullying.

"Come now. You want to be coaxed, that's all ails you. Come on, and take the shine off the other girls. Right as you are now, kitchen apron and all, you could make 'em sing small. Come along."

Lika's slow mouth framed its difficult reply.

"I tank you. I do not wish to go."

MacLaren's eyes snapped.

"Oho! Guess you're waitin' for Barney Harrigan to come back and ask you. You may's well quit waitin' for Barney, my beauty. He's got him another girl, long ago, and a queen, mind that. Ain't I seen 'em together in St. Louis? Ain't he turned his back on me, the big sneak he is, an' wouldn't look my way? Ain't he——"

His jeering voice stopped short. He stared at the girl with blank eyes. She had not moved nor spoken. Her eyes were fixed on the smoke-piled roofs, the wide, quiet stream. A queer chill ran through his big body. A man might as well be a ghost, for all those blue intent eyes saw of him!

"Well, I'll not butt in any longer." He stepped back, with a baffled jauntiness. "Later you may feel different. Good afternoon."

Again Lika dipped her courtesy. Arrogant and

gay, MacLaren strode whistling down the street. Lika did not see nor hear.

She locked her kitchen and went away, down the long roundabout hill road, then up the long, rough stone stairs to the cabin on the ledge. The summer wind waved the honeysuckle sprays like fairy censers. Under its green and flowered cloak the little shack was a lodge of Elfland.

Back in the box-kitchen, huddled in her red-plush rocker, sat the little wispy grandmother. The Finnegan baby, a rose-leaf armful, cooed and chuckled in her lap. As Lika came in, the baby squealed with delight, and stretched out imploring fat arms. But the old woman's face darkened wilfully.

"I have had him such a little while," she whined. "And now you will take him away from me!"

"No, no. You shall keep him till the sun goes down," Lika promised gently. She put their two rooms in order, and set out their supper. The old woman smacked her lips over the hot porridge, but she kept a jealous eye on the baby. When Lika picked up the little fellow and started for the door, she dropped her spoon and began to wail. The baby observed her with alarm, then doubled up with a deafening roar.

"You will take him away from me! Always you will take him away!"

"But it is past sundown. His mother is vexed when we keep him so late," Lika pleaded. She stood helpless before this double onslaught. "And the steps

are steep, grandmother. If I wait until darkness, I might trip and let him fall. To-morrow you shall have him, all the long day. Ei, dear one, grieve not!" Distressed, she bent and clasped the little piteous sobbing creature tenderly. Then she hurried away. But half-way down the rock stair a shrill whistle from below halted her.

"Hi, Miss Lika!" At the foot stood the eldest Finnegan, megaphoning through two small smudgy hands. "Maw says would youse kindly keep the kid all night? Pa's goin' take us all to the movies. All right. Much obliged!"

Lika went back swiftly, the baby tossed high. The old woman still sat whimpering. But at sight of the baby she screamed, and snatched for him like a child for her doll. Lika went on about her work. Behind her the two voices cooed and murmured, the baby's chuckles answering the old cracked loving whispers in soft antiphony.

At last her tasks were done. A long minute she stood at the window, looking out past the sheer white precipice at the deepening afterglow of river and sky. Then she shook down her mass of pale-gold hair and braided it into a great shining crown. She put on a fresh dress and tied on a clean apron crackling with starch. Then she went to her little trunk and unlocked it, and drew out a bundle wrapped in white cloth.

She sat down on the porch step and unrolled it carefully. It spread across her knees in broad gleam-

ing folds—a great web of old hand-wove linen, bleached white as frost, half-covered with embroidery finer than frostwork; roses, fern-leaves, interlacing wreath on wreath, all white, all mystic white. A strange and sumptuous thing for that poor little house to boast! And there was something almost eerie in its very whiteness, something daunting in the strange grace of those pale flowers, blooming upon their field of snow.

Lika stitched away with flying hands. The frost-flowers grew under her touch like witchery, yet she seldom looked at her work. Back of her, generation on patient generation, the women of her blood had sat in their dim little kitchens through the long dim Northland winters, while the men were away on fishing voyages, and woven their delicate stitches, with never a downward glance. For their eyes were watching, always—out through the narrow windows, out past the gray harbor, past the gray tossing horizon—for a glimpse of home-coming sails. And Lika's skill, like their own, was never skill; instead, an instinct as much a piece of her as the curve of her mouth, the shine of her thick, bright hair.

After a while the grandmother tottered out. She grasped a fold of linen. Her eyes were too dim to see, but her horny fingers had not lost their cunning. Up and down they slid, following every tendril, every leaf. At last she spoke.

"It is too broad for cloth of your bridal gown. It is too narrow for the table of your bridal feast."

"'White my flax, red my ring, gold the heart of my betrothed——'"

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Lika's needle sped on.

"It is of the heavy flax, the Danish flax." She hummed to herself an old, old round:

" 'White my flax, red my ring, gold the heart of my betrothed——'

"Ah, it is not linen of bridal. It is linen of sepulture. It is thy winding-sheet!"

Lika's needle flew. The old woman's hands slid on, groping. Upon her wrinkled face shone a proud and wistful remembering.

"You will hold it fast, the name of all our women," her little cracked voice rang sweet with praise. "Not one of us but has gone to her grave wrapped in our own linen, stiff with needle-work. *We* do not go shamed and skimped to our graves."

She nodded, gratified. But a shrill cry startled her. Dropping the linen, she shuffled indoors, and caught up the baby again. Happily she settled herself in her rocker, and gathered the little nestling thing close, with soft chirps and croonings.

Soon heavy steps came up the stairs and along the ledge. Lika glanced up absently.

MacLaren was accoutred for conquest. He had given up too easily that afternoon. That was no way to hold a woman. They needed a firm hand. To-night he strode, masterly. No trace of the flushed suppliant here. Spruce and handsome in fine new clothes, his bold head flung high, he marched down the ledge.

"Evening, Lika. Ready an' waitin' for me, eh?

That's the girl! We'll be good an' early, for the band has just gone to the hall."

Lika set another stitch.

"Sewin' up the last inch of daylight, hey?" laughed MacLaren. "Quittin' time, now. Come on."

His big hand grasped her arm. Lika looked up.

"I tank you, Mister MacLaren. I do not wish to go."

Something in that consummate unconcern flamed through the man's veins like wild-fire.

"Oh, you don't wish to go. Well, I wish different, see? Put down that sewing-truck, and march. I've taken all the slams I mean to take, young lady. March, now."

Gripping her wrist, he pulled her to her feet. The touch of the velvet-soft flesh, the white, beautiful face so close, swept him past himself. With a muttered word, he bent to seize her. She did not seem to draw back. But, inexplicably, she drifted from his grasp. He might as well have clasped a woman of mist.

"What in—" His grip loosened on her arm. Again he felt that curious ghostly tremor that had shaken him even in the broad daylight. He shrank a step. Then his anger flared. He grasped her shoulders and pushed her back, against the perpendicular cliff wall. Where they stood the ledge narrowed to a bare ten feet, sheer rock above and below. He glowered down into her listless face.

"Got you fast now, miss. Let's have no more foolin'. Give us a kiss and come on with your man."

"I will not. I haf no man now. Go away. Please."

"Not much I won't. See?" He bent over her, breathing quick.

"Ach, begone, I say." Lika spoke mildly as if to a troublesome animal. As his face leaned close, she set both powerful hands against his chest and pushed him away. Perhaps she did not realize her own strength. Perhaps MacLaren's foot turned on a stone. Back he went, two uncertain steps; then, with a gasping scream, he pitched down over the cliff.

Thirty feet down a clump of scrub-oak caught and held him. For some time he lay there, groaning and swearing. At last he dragged himself free, and crawled weakly inch by inch along the face of the bluff, till he reached the rock stairs. Down them he crept, and disappeared in the thickening dusk.

One glance over the bluff had satisfied Lika that MacLaren was not badly hurt. She hung at the edge, watching, silent. When finally he had limped away, halting to shake his fist up at the ledge, she went back to her work.

The last sunset gleam faded. The river turned from fiery copper to sullen murky gray. She could no longer see the thread. Yet unerringly she set her stitches, one by one.

Suddenly her body stiffened, taut. Her eyes flared wide. She leaned forward, trembling, and stared down. Up the long stairs came a dark shape—a man, hurrying, stumbling, all but spent with exhaus-

tion. Yet he plunged on, his lean tall figure reeling in desperate haste, his black head lifted.

Lika pitched to her feet. The great web fell beside her. Every drop of blood went out of her face. Ashen, swaying, she clung to the door and stared and stared down at the man, now panting up the last steps. He had reached the ledge; he was striding down toward the shack. Now, his hot eyes strained through the dusk, he saw her. And his voice rang out, a cry of utter joy and passion: "Lika! Lika! My girl, my own girl! Lika! Lika! Lika!"

Lika did not stir. White as the drifted linen, she clung against the door. Her blue eyes blazed upon him. Her beautiful face grew hard as steel.

"Lika! Lika!" The man stumbled close, hungry arms outstretched. He was bony and haggard, and blue-lipped with fatigue, but his face was the face of a great eager boy. "Lika, mavourneen! Come to me! You'll not be afraid, my sweet. 'Tis no ghost I am, 'tis just Barney, yer own man. Darlin'! Come!"

Lika's face set like a stone. She tried to speak. At last the words came, hoarse and broken.

"So. You dare to come back. You dare to speak me beloved. You who mocked me. You who threw me away for another. Ei! Coward!"

The man stood stock-still. He did not even flinch. But his jaw dropped with bewilderment, and his gaunt face grew paler. He laid one big bony hand on her arm.

" 'Tis dreamin' ye are, Lika, darlin'," he said tenderly. "You've never forgot yer Barney! 'Tis the long cruel wait has turned yer sweet wits, girl. Look at me. Don't ye know me, heart's treasure? Don't ye know yer own man?"

"Oh, yes, I know. I know who you are." Lika laughed, an ugly laugh. Her eyes lit with a cruel gleam. "You are my Barney. So. You gave me your promise. You put the ring on my finger. You were my man forever. Eh! Then you went away, far. You sent me not one word. You left me to tear myself in little pieces. You left me, and went to another woman. You have laughed with her, you have held her in your arms——"

"You lie!" The boy leaped on her. He clutched her shoulders, shook her fiercely. "You lie! There's niver been no other woman. There niver could be—A—ah!" His furious face grew tender again. "It's the long sorrow has betrayed you, dear love. You've grieved till your blessed soul is sick within you. Lika, girl! Come!"

"No, it is not sorrow that has betrayed me. But you—you! Have they not told me? Did they not see you, two months gone, with her, that stranger? In the great park at St. Louis—ei?" Out rang her shrill, infuriate laugh. "It was a day of great wind, so you would walk close, to shield her, as you have walked close with me. And together you laughed and sang, as you and I laughed and sang, when we have raced together through the great snow and the

storm. And at the bridge you stopped and stood together, and looked down at the river——"

"Oh, we did!" The man began to gasp. A flood of red poured over his face. He bent and glared into her eyes. "Oho! A woman, in the park—and we laughed and sang together! And MacLaren, he it was that saw me, and told you? 'Tis strange that I don't ricollect, at all. Yet not so strange, when ye mind that not a woman's face have I seen, nor has my foot stepped the green grass, all these six months I've laid in prison."

"In prison?"

"Yes. In prison. In Hooperstown, West Virginny, if 'twould inthrest ye to know." He drew back, still staring down at her pale, dazed face with savage eyes. "Down to the mines I went, as well ye know, to find me brother Francis, when word came he was hurt an' in trouble. Well, find him I did. Struck down by a guard's bullet, he was, sick to death, an' penned in that filthy jail, like a mad beast. He was 'most gone when I got there. F'r a wonder they let me in, they let him talk to me—an' he died that night, wid his poor hand clutchin' mine, an' his poor head on me knee. An' next day, at sundown, three of the mines' guard do be comin' to the house where I'd stayed an' arrestin' me f'r disorderly conduct. Disorderly conduct of buryin' me own brother! An' they took me to the stone house, an' locked me in, not ten steps from where Francis had lain an' moaned his life away. Six months ago yisterday

it was. I've kept me tally close. An' there I've stayed."

Lika did not stir. She hardly seemed to breathe. Her blue eyes burned darkly on his face, so bleached, so worn with pain.

"Then all these months you have lain in prison. You have lain in sorrow. You have gone alone."

"Alone? Oh, no!" His voice veered to high mockery. " 'Tis yourself knows better, me girl. Isn't it yourself has telled me how I've laughed and sung an' carried on wid a girl in St. Louis? Me, that lay on me planks night on night, an' fed me starved soul wid thoughts of you?"

"Ah-h!" Lika pushed past him. She stooped and gathered the great web of linen into her arms. It trailed around her in folds as white as frost. Even in the dusk the great embroidered blossoms were faintly visible.

"Ah, see!" She thrust the cloth into his hands. "All the black winter I slept in terror for you, I woke in pain. And yet I hoped—and hoped. But two months gone they came to me and told me—that they had seen you in the city, with that other. That you would not speak to them, and turned and passed them by. And I was a fool. For I listened. And—I believed. And all the life went from me, and all the wish to live."

"Lika. Lika——"

"Listen. I looked on her," she pointed to the old grandmother, huddled content in the dusk. "I knew

that soon she would go. For she is very old, and very tired. And I thought, when she goes I will go too. Then none will need me. So I brought out this linen of my mother's weaving. And I set to work."

"Your mother's weaving? You— What do you mean, girl? Speak out!"

"It is the custom of our people. Can you not see? Do you not understand?"

Puzzled, the man took hold of the great web, and fumbled at the embroidery. Then he cried out with a scared furious cry. He threw the linen down, with a stamp of loathing. Then he stooped and seized it again. His big hands were wasted and nerveless from fever. But they shut over that flowered mass like clamps of steel. With one snatch he tore the cere-cloth through from hem to hem. He balled the strips and threw them far over the bluff. They saw them fall slowly, fluttering like torn wings, till they dropped from sight on the black river-brim.

"Ach!" breathed Lika. "Gone!"

She took a step toward the man. But he was already stumbling to her. His weary arms locked her close. His sobbing whisper died against her cheek. "Lika! Lika! Beloved! Beloved!"

It was a hushed, white night, full of soft winds and fragrant silences. The full moon lifted a broad ivory disk above the ragged horizon-line. Under that calm mellow radiance, Holliday's rough hills and

cluttered hollows lay as beneath a deep and tranquil charm. That pure glory folded squat foundries and rusty dump-cars in the same enchantment that once enfolded Helen's ivory battlements, a certain latticed casement in Verona.

Soon its broadening light struck down upon the ledge and picked out every line of Lika's tiny shack distinct and clear. More than ever frail and tiny it seemed, an hour's lodging for Robin Goodfellow. Yet it hung there, strong enough to hold fast two wild young hearts, fitly spacious to house a world of joy.

Back in the dark little kitchen the old woman sat in her red-plush rocker, the Finnegan baby cuddled to her caved old breast. The rocker was very comfortable; the last kernels of fire were still red in the stove and their warmth was grateful to her old bones. She was humming to herself, a queer little drowsy tune that had wandered away, away, across a land all steep white cliffs and sparkling icy fiords; a tune that her mother's mother had crooned to the silky head on her breast when all Europe crouched and fawned at one spurred heel, when Moscow's blazing domes lit the black night sky. Her shrivelled hands locked in jealous delight over the little sleeping thing in her arms. There was a quaint contentment in her face; the grave assured contentment of a creature that holds fast in its two hands the one sovereign key to joy, the one true talisman.

From the vine-clad stoop there came, from time

to time, low voices. Lika, blundering considerably for sheer ecstasy, had managed at length to set food and drink before her man. Now they sat together, Lika on the step above, her beautiful head bent to meet the dark adoring face upturned to her. To-night Lika's eyes were dark calm lakes of blue. Her strong splendid body breathed deep with peace. And her soft whisper answered the passionate whisper at her knee.

"Look at the river, my man, all fretted silver like grandmother's coif of bridal, and the great still sky, and all the little patient stars." Her hands clasped the man's hand, folded it against her warm throat, cradled it close. "Oh, the beautiful world, because it holds you, beloved! Yet it has been as if I walked through burning ashes, through black evil night. And I had only one wish left. To go, to go from it all——"

"Hush!" The man's hoarse whisper silenced her. His covetous arms reached up and drew her down into his clasp. The smell of her wheat-gold hair was in his nostrils, the warmth of her tender mouth against his cheek. "Let it all go, my blessed. 'Tis all gone anyhow, the pain, an' the grief, an' the ugly long distrust. I've got ye in my two arms, mavourneen. I'll never be lettin' ye go again. An' yet——" Suddenly his grasp loosened. His boyish voice shook. "Yet shame on me, to be snatchin' ye, sweet! For I've naught to give ye, Lika. I've no money left at all, I've only me two hands to work f'r ye——"

Lika flung back her head. She laughed aloud, a deep, full-throated bubbling peal.

"So ye've no riches to bring me, my man? Nothing but your own self, beloved? Nothing but my whole world. Ach!" Her lovely face bent close above his own; her lips touched his forehead. Her voice poured out, a deep, sweet mother-note, the tenderest Northland word of love. "Ach, so foolish you are, heart's treasure, my own little child!"

Above the bluffs, on the broad bare new avenue, the moon shone clear upon the Burtons' ornate bungalow. Its light softened even those gingerbread splendors to gracious harmony. Burnt turf and sickly shrubs were veiled in gentle shadow; even the spindling geraniums were mercifully hid from sight. But all that necromancy could not transform the outlook for Mrs. Burton's eyes. She still tingled with the grievances of the day. Its trials put the capsheaf on a prodigiously looming pile of grievance.

"If only I had a fair chance, John, I could entertain your guests properly. But in this unspeakable town, and in this house! I *know* I have a social gift. I could have made Mr. Channing's luncheon a memorable affair, if I'd had the right china and silver, and somebody else besides that great lump of a girl to serve. But you really can't *expect*——"

Mr. Burton smoked on stolidly. Perhaps it occurred to him that, had her talent been of such transcendent essence, she'd have made that luncheon

memorable without stage-properties. Instead, he took her reproaches in silence. He was used to taking things in silence.

"It does seem sometimes as if I couldn't *endure* this place another minute!" Mrs. Burton's monologue was tending ominously toward tears. "I'm so *utterly* sick and tired of my life here. 'Holliday'! The irony of it! Not a holiday thought in all this hideous town, not a breath of music, not a gleam of romance. I do think you might let me go back to New Rochelle and have a little real life for once. Anything to get away from Holliday. Hateful place, it's just what I've always called it, it's prose. Raw prose!"

"Well—if you want a trip home so badly, I dare say—I'll try to let you have the money somehow." At last Mr. Burton broke his silence. His voice was rather flat. He bent and rapped his pipe on the veranda rail. "I suppose you'll have to have a couple of hundred as a starter. It doesn't come very easy just now." He halted. His mouth worked in a soundless computation. He'd be put to it, all right, to let her have even two hundred just at this time, for he was running mighty close to the wind. He had put up everything but his life-insurance to meet last month's pay-roll, and he had a note coming due at the bank Saturday. And Mr. Channing had been heart-sickeningly vague as to further investment. However, if Hattie wanted it, she'd have to have it, that was all.

"Guess I'll manage, somehow." His big, loose-jointed body sagged back in the chair. He drew a stealthy breath, and looked at his wife through the airy haze of moonlight—her dainty petulant attitude; her exquisite gown; her pretty, petulant, discontented small face. His own face took on a curious look, a little wistful, a little grim. "I reckon you're about right, Hattie. Seems like nowadays life's mostly prose. Raw prose."

"But, Tim, this iss your job. You haf' promise' de boss, und de Big Chief, too. You cannot lay down und kvit." Marilka drew herself up, straight and tall as a young tree. Her wide ice-blue eyes, blue as her own Northland fjords, looked steadily into Tim's flushed somber face. Her voice rang with the deep pleading mother-tone that poured always from her slim girl-throat when she spoke to her own man. Briarley shook his big shoulders, as if that voice had been a pleading hand.

"Promised the boss, is it? An' promised Big Chief, too? What if I'd promised the Angel Gabriel that I'd finish this hell of a contract? Look round ye, now." He waved his arm towards his battered little dredge, the gaunt unpainted quarter-boat nosing alongside, the solitary coal barge. Against that broad primeval background of river and woods and pale March sky, the outfit looked like a bunch of forlorn playthings. "Be lookin' at them boats, I say. The grand plant I've slaved me heart out to buy, these five years gone! I was goin' to be a boss meself, an' a Big Chief, too. But what chance has one man, wid no money, against this drainage game? Fire, an' flood, an' strikes, an' coal shortage! De'il's

luck, every step of the way. This very mornin', didn't I set down an' figure out where I'm at. Mortgaged to the eyebrows, I knew. Just to raise money for to start. But now, what wid bad weather an' breakdowns, this last month's work has put me three hundred dollars in the hole. Three hundred dollars! An' me, tied by my dam' contract to keep on diggin' till November! Not one cent's profit dare I hope to make. 'Twill be a miracle if I break even."

"Maybe de weather will not be so bad no more." Marilka's ice-blue eyes grew soft with sympathy.

"Better weather, is it? Wait till next month. Rain, rain, till this country is just a steamin' swamp, till yer berm slides down faster than ye can dredge it out! Then comes the cruel heat, an' the malary, head on. 'Tis then yer men sneaks off between shifts, an' yer cook gets sick on ye, an' yer machine balks an' smashes, an' right in the thick of it, in jumps the Inspector, wid his fine high boots, an' his bullyin' tongue, an' says, 'Speed up, me laddybuck, fer ye'll be penalized fifty dollars a day, sure, if ye don't finish on the limit.' Aigh! The dog's life it is, entirely!" His furious voice dropped. He slumped back against the rail.

Marilka studied him: his big sagging frame, his heavy sullen face; a boy's face, yet scarred deep with the twin corrosives of merciless overwork and bitter failure. Her own face grew grave, intent. She was just nineteen, in the first bloom of her splendid Northland beauty, yet she seemed far more mature

than her Tim, at twenty-four. Perhaps it was the brooding gentleness of the glance she bent upon him. Always, when she looked at Tim, her eyes shone with the quaint arrogant pride of the woman who looks on her beloved rebellious eldest son.

"But you will not throw down your contract, Tim. You are no quitter."

"I've a mind to turn quitter, all right."

"But you are no two-faced Janus!" Her first year in America, Marilka had cooked in the house of a Chicago University professor. From the five children she had "learned her English," a mixture both academic and profane. "You haf not no yellow streak, my Tim. You will not break your word!"

"I ain't so blame' sure, whether I'll keep me word or not. You, Rory! Watch your dipper-handle. Slack her, quick! Ah-h! Whoop! Ease her, I say! Ease her!"

Rory Dugan, the green cranesman, amiably curious as what the Cap'n and his wife might be argyin' about, had let the backing-chain catch over a stump ashore. The great dipper-handle swung sidewise, then buckled, groaning. Then with a tearing crash it split clean across.

Marilka gasped. Tim did not make a sound. He stood dazed, staring at the ruin. A new dipper-handle,—two hundred dollars would barely buy the timber for it. Then five days' idleness for the whole crew. A loss of four hundred dollars—four hundred

dollars! And already he staggered, mired in debt. No use. No chance, now.

A queer pallor settled on his dark face.

"Four hundred dollars!" he muttered. "Can ye beat it? Well, I don't try. I'm done."

He stumbled away, across the narrow board bridge from dredge to canal-bank, then along the bank to the cabin-boat where he and Marilka lived. He plunged in and closed the door.

Marilka looked after him. Her eyes grew misty, but she did not follow.

"He will be taking his launch down-river, for make de St. Louis train," she told the stricken Rory. "There de saw-mill will cut him another dipper-handle, und he will rush it back, ver' queeck. No, I leave him alone. He wishes not that I butt in."

The cabin door opened. Out came Tim, carrying his cheap suitcase. He strode back to the dredge, very big, very controlled: yet under that strange pallor his boyish face looked drained and gaunt, lifeless, almost. A minute, he stood staring at his wife. He put up an unsteady hand and touched the great silver-gold braids that bound her lovely head. Suddenly he flung both great arms around her, and crushed her to his hard-beating heart.

"Oh, Marilka! You beauty! You loveliest!" The words broke hoarsely against her soft cheeks, her fragrant mouth. "Good-bye, my own woman. Be a good girl, now!"

He sprang down into his rickety launch, where

Smith, the handyman, already waited. Another minute, and the launch shot through the mouth of the canal, swung past the river bend, disappeared.

Marilka went slowly to her cabin-boat. It would be a lonely two days with Tim gone.

Tim's discarded sweater lay on a chair in the tiny wax-neat kitchen. She picked it up, folded it gently. Then her eyes fell on a scrawled sheet of paper, lying on the table. She bent and looked at it.

Suddenly a stab of terror pierced her heart. She swayed, clutching the table. She stared down, trembling, at that scrawled page. But no sound came from her. Eyes flared wide, white lips set, she read on, on.

"Marilka, I've quit. This last bust-up has got my Goat. The Co. can take the Dredge & Outfit. They wont no more nor cover Morgidge & Debts. You will find 100 Dollars in the Boatmens Bank in St. Louis to your name. It is all I got. I aint comming back till I ernt some more. If I don't ern any more I aint comming back. Go to your cuzzins in Chi. and bord till you hear from me. No more at present from yours truly

"Timothy Francis Briarley, Esq."

Marilka sat down, quivering. Her gripped knuckles shone white: her mouth trembled like a child's. However, it did not occur to her to cry or moan. For a while, her thoughts were a reeling chaos of

terror. But soon her sturdy sane will awoke and took command.

She crept out on deck, and stood looking at the huddle of boats: Tim's boats; the pitiful priceless little fleet that he had slaved these five years to buy —and slaved in vain. And as she looked, her slow clear mind set coolly to blocking out its plan.

Tim's contract was the dredging of small lateral ditches through a marshy isolated district along the Illinois River. It was five miles by launch to the railroad, eight miles to any town. It was an ugly place to work; it was hard to keep labor, hard to bring supplies. The excavation itself was a tough job, even for an experienced dredge-man.

Now Tim had gone. Tim would not come back. The dredge, the boats, and the double crew, ten men in all, were left in her hands. However, this was Tim's job. As Tim's wife, it was up to her to put her man's contract through.

She counted the risks she must take. There was not another woman for miles about. She would face loneliness, perhaps actual danger, as well as certain gossip. She could not make the contract a success. Tim himself had vowed he could not break even. But this was Tim Briarley's job. It was up to Tim Briarley's woman to put that job through.

After a while, she went back to the kitchen. She opened the stove and thrust in the letter. Then she changed her print dress for a street suit, and went tranquilly across to the dredge. There she sat, in

the pale sunlight, her strong hands folded, quiet as a statue.

Presently Smith came back with the launch. Marilka then remarked that she was going to the Landing, to do some shopping. She took the launch down-river alone.

Her shopping consisted of a brief long-distance talk with the saw-mill manager at St. Louis. Four days later, the new dipper-handle arrived at camp. Marilka directed its shipping-up. In the six months that she had lived on the work, she had picked up a deal of useful information. Then, briefly, she addressed the crew.

"Mister Briarley, he will be away, on business. We go right on with the work, like he was here."

A murmur of amazement arose. Marilka turned serenely to the dredge-runner.

"Lamson, you will boss de night crew, same as always. Me, I run de day shift. Efry other week, I swap off mit you on de night job."

"You run the day shift!" Lamson gaped. His lean shrewd face turned copper-color. "A woman run a dredge! An eleven-hour shift, at that!"

"Yes. It is not hard. Only it keeps you on de keen yump."

"You bet it does." Lamson was honestly appalled. "You can't do it, Marm. It ain't no woman's work. It ain't to be thought of."

"But it is my Tim's work. I do it, in his place."

Lamson spluttered, without avail. The crew

looked on, scandalized. Marilka did not argue. Instead, she set to work. By the third day, the crew's shocked disapproval had veered to admiration. In a week, they would have gleefully thrashed any wretch who dared hint that a woman could not run a dredge, and run it to beat the cars. Only Lamson gloomed.

"It's no work for a woman, nohow. Hold yer long skirts back from that machinery! Mark my words, ye'll get clawed, soon or late. If ye'd on'y put on overalls——"

Marilka frowned.

"There is nothing to catch mine skirts. No cogs, no wheels, neither."

"Well, that spud chain might. You, Pete, let go the spud yonder. Don't go so close, Marm. You—Holy Moses! Jump! Quick, I say! Ach——"

Pete had let go the huge half-ton timber astern. The spud chain shot through the hawse-hole and across the deck, springing a foot off the boards with every jerk. One whizzing loop struck Marilka's skirt. The ragged edge of a defective link caught fast, snatched her across-deck like a paper doll, and slammed her against the side framing. She toppled back, limp.

Lamson reached her with one leap. He snatched her up, and carried her across to her cabin-boat, abusing her like a roustabout, in a panic of anger and alarm.

"*Now*, d'you see! Stubborn fool-woman ye are!"

The breath was completely knocked out of Marilka. Blood trickled from a broad cut on her forehead. Her sleeve dripped blood from a jagged gash on her shoulder. But she refused to let him send for a doctor. Clay-white, but placid as the sunlight, she lay and gave orders while he rummaged for alcohol and liniment, and tied on clumsy bandages.

"De crew lays off for to-day," she announced, at length. "Und to-morrow, I puts me on overalls. I am a fool, Mister Lamson, but even fools can learn."

Two days after, she went back to work, caparisoned in Tim's old overalls, shortened to knickers, in which she looked like a slim handsome boy. But she never put on those knickers without a loathing that shook her to the soul. The primitive instinct to keep herself absolutely woman was so strong that she shrank away, shamed, from the eyes of her own workmen. And she dreaded unspeakably to be seen by outsiders. Always she kept a long skirt hanging in the engine-cab. By law, every launch entering the canal must whistle as it turned in from the river. This warning gave her time to fling on her skirt. By the time that the visiting launch rubbed alongside, she would come forth as prim as the hostess of a sewing-circle.

News of Briarley's disappearance filtered slowly through the District. When Megan, the walkin' boss under whom Briarley had held his billet, got the word, he chewed on his pipe for some minutes. Then he

called the Company's pet cub engineer, an apple-cheeked infant, Tech. 1916, and bade him go up the Canal, send Briarley's woman packing to her folks, and take over the boats for the Company. Top-heavy with authority, Tech. 1916 chuffed off upstream.

He was slightly jolted to find, not a blowsy Amazon, but a tall grave girl with a voice of such liquid music as accelerated even his seasoned young heart. Brusquely he spoke his command. Marilka listened, fair, unmoved.

"So. But my man is gone. Till my man comes back, I am as my man to de Company. I shall not go away."

"But—but—this is orders, Madam. Besides, the president of the Company, the Big Chief himself, is coming out from New York next week. If—if he finds you here—well—I really——"

His voice trailed off miserably. Marilka smiled.

"Tell Big Chief I do not go. This is my man's job. I stay here."

"But—but if he is angry——"

A minute, Marilka hesitated. Then the language of the Professorial household came to her aid. Her voice was honey of Hymettus now.

"If he is angry, tell him, go speak for yourself, John. Then will I make clear to him that I do the work of my man, and as fast, and as well. And if he must still weary his mouth with vain speaking, I shall slap his wrist for him."

Tech. 1916 bowed and fled. He reached headquarters in a state bordering on hysteria, and told Megan that there was a Valhalla goddess up at Briarley's dredge who talked like the Old Testament and Hurry-up Yost, and whose chest tones would make Nazimova curl up and die. The walkin' boss, however, knew not Nazimova. He chewed reflectively on his pipe.

"Well, it's a doggone shame. She's a good woman, and a peach of a looker, for all she's a dumb Swede. I'd give me month's check for a chance to hand Briarley his. The measly pup, to desert a girl like her!"

"But she says he hasn't deserted her. She says he's only gone for a month, that he'll come back."

"Sure, they always say that." Megan's grizzled brows narrowed. He stared out across the muddy yellow river. " 'Tis the way of all real women, me son. 'Tis the everlastin' mother in 'em, to think their spoilt runaway kid will get tired playin' hookey by night, an' come sneakin' home to them. God bless 'em for it, the poor mischancy fools they are!"

Tech. '16 considered.

"Um. What if—if she finds there's another woman?"

Megan's eyes rolled, portentous.

"If iver she dreams there's another woman—then Heaven have mercy on Tim Briarley! For there'll be no mercy in herself, mind that. Once wake the mate-anger in that broodin' mother-heart of her, an'

ye'll see fire and brimstone. But no danger. For Briarley is as fine, bould, decent a fella as ever trod shoe-leather. But he's fed up on ill-luck. It's heart-broke he is, an' heart-scalded for anger and shame. What's more—" Megan's eye lit with a queer shamed twinkle—"what's more, ye yerself have seen the woman he married?"

"You bet I have." Tech. '16 blazed up promptly. "She's a queen. How that brute could go off and leave her——"

"Whist, now. A queen she is. An' peaceable as a May mornin'. An' a lady atop of it all. An'—harkee to the wisdom of me mouth. 'Tis the unsanctified nature of man to fly the face of perfection, fast as he can put one fut before the other. D'ye see?"

"I can't say I do." Tech. '16 sounded a bit peevish.

"Well, niver mind." Megan knocked out his pipe. "Yer day will come. Believe me, son, ye'll see."

The President of the Interstate Drainage Company swung round in his chair like a large masterful cyclone, and fixed his subordinates with a steel-gray eye.

"What's this stuff I hear, about Briarley throwing up his job? And his wife running the dredge?"

There was a pause. It was a painful pause. Big Chief suddenly rose up, gigantic, grim.

"Do I infer, gentlemen," with terrifying mildness,

"that you have paid no attention to these rumors?"

Tech. '16 began to burble.

"We t-tried to dislodge her, sir."

"Tried to! May I ask what persuasions you employed?"

"We didn't try dinnymite." Thus Megan, bland and meek.

"But you did try everything else. Um. Signal your launch, Megan."

A gleam of unhallowed joy lit Tech. '16's fair young face. A like gleam flickered on Megan's lowly brow.

As the launch grated alongside, Marilka came forward, seemly in skirts. The sunlight gleamed on her great silver-gold braids. Her eyes shone, blue as stars. Big Chief stood up hurriedly, and jerked off his hat. His voice boomed loud and clear.

"This is Mrs. Briarley? Honored to meet you, madam. I regret that we can avail ourselves of your services no longer. Mr. Megan, here, will take over your books. Right away."

Marilka looked at him, grave and sweet.

"I tank you, sir. But Mr. Megan need not trouble. I stay here."

"But Mr. Briarley has broken his contract. By law, we take over the management of the boats. At once."

"But de contract is not broke. My man is gone away. I stand in my man's place. Why is it needful, so to paw de air?"

Big Chief frowned.

"You have managed admirably. But we take charge now. I will send Garrity down to-night. He will run the day shift in your place."

Marilka's cheek warmed from ivory to rose.

"I wish not Mister Garrity. I know him. He would not stop a crack to keep de wind away. I shall run de day shift. All de contract through."

"Indeed you won't. A woman like you, to stay here in this swamp, and work with a pack of roughnecks! Preposterous!"

Marilka's voice sank like a deep organ-tone.

"I haf said enough. I stay."

"Rubbish. Go, now, and pack up. Hurry."

The Big Chief was quite edgy now. Down came his broad mandatory hand on Marilka's shoulder.

Marilka drew back. She seemed to swell and grow tall. Her voice held its slow tranquillity, but her deep eyes flamed on him.

"What for a man are you? To lay your hand on another man's woman!

Now, the Chief had no more thought of laying an impious finger on Marilka than the man in the moon. But Marilka was not taking any chances. Swift as a piston, her solid white fist shot out and landed squarely on the Chief's solid chin. The Chief turned a back somersault into the canal, as neatly as if he had rehearsed it a week.

Back in the launch, the walkin' boss all but swallowed his pipe. Tech. '16 fell against the gunwale.

Then sheer horror shut off the laughter on his mouth, as abruptly as a turned faucet.

The Chief rose sputtering out of ten feet of ditch-water, not in the least like Aphrodite from her foam. Without doubt, he was the wettest and the maddest man in the sovereign State of Illinois. Gasping, snorting, blowing mud like a startled rhinoceros, he flounced and wallowed towards the launch. Weak but deferential, Tech. '16 hauled him on board. He stood up, mud and water sluicing from him, a mighty shape of rage: an infuriate cave-man in ruined gray serge and a pearl tie-pin. He shook both huge fists at Marilka's moveless face.

"If I don't fix you for this, you—you—" he bellowed. But the sound of his own voice jerked him back to sanity. A minute he stood, eyes bulging, mouth agape; then, with a howl like a Comanche, he threw himself in a heap in the bow. Yell on yell of laughter shook him to his eminent depths. He beat the gunwale with both shapely fists. Tears of laughter streamed down his cheeks, and mingled with the clay upon his chin.

Behind him, Tech. '16 lay back and rocked like a colored aunty at a camp-meeting. Megan took his pipe carefully out of his mouth, and hammered Tech. '16 with a monkey-wrench.

"Oh, Lord! *Oh*, Lord!" The Chief sat up at last. Feebly he wiped his weeping eyes. "C-can't protect yourself—Oh, blazes!" He began to wail again, then checked himself. His voice swung to its bluff mar-

tinet tone. "I leave you in charge, Mrs. Briarley. You are fully able to manage this work. To keep discipline, too, by Jove! Good-morning!"

He bowed, grandly. The launch slid away down the canal.

"No wonder he's counted the biggest engineerin' boss in Ameriky," observed Megan, under his breath.

"No," said Tech. '16, frankly awed. "No wonder."

Marilka had scant leisure to savor her triumph. The crowded days fairly shouldered on her. High water came early. For miles the country was a stagnant lake. Then came the sudden terrible heat, and with it mosquitoes, and malaria, and grouches past counting. Marilka worked shoulder to shoulder with her men. She asked no favors. She shared the night shifts, "fifty-fifty," despite Lamson's growls. The night of the big storm, when the coal barge broke away, she struggled through rain and wind to the quarter-boat, roused the day crew, then handled the big searchlight while they chased the runaway with the launch, towed her back, and moored her a mile up the canal for greater safety. When Jezebel, the new dipper-handle, broke her bail, she let the crew swear it out, then gave them the day off, while she went to town for a blacksmith. Every day, besides her eleven-hour shift, she spent toiling hours in listing supplies, in making up her eternal reports and time-books. The strain told on her. She thinned and whitened, but she plodded on.

The first of June came a letter from Briarley, forwarded by her cousin in Chicago. The sight of that sprawling hand turned Marilka faint and sick. Gripping it in cold fingers, she went to her cabin-boat and locked herself in. It was minutes before she dared open it. Finally she tore it across. Out fell two ten-dollar bills. There was not one word of writing.

A wave of fury swept her. She threw money and envelope on the floor, and went back to her work, white-lipped and ablaze. But that night she sat for an hour, crooning over the dingy envelope, her lashes wet, her soft mouth quivering. And she fell asleep clasping it tight to her warm breast, as if it were a tiny living thing.

A week later, Jezebel broke her bail again. Aboard the little local train, returning, as she sat dozing in the twilight, she heard her own name. She did not stir. But every nerve listened.

Behind her, two women's voices whispered on.

"Yes, there's a woman at the bottom of Briarley's doings, all right. Though, with his nice wife——"

"Aw, she's nothin' but a dumb Swede. For sure there's another woman. Buck Penney come up from Natchez last week. He swears he saw Tim on the Natchez packet, talkin' an' laughin' with a fine black-haired girl, in a grand plumed hat. Says I, 'Buck, you're dippy. For why does Tim Briarley go sparkin' any black-haired girl when he has a wife of his own? An' a good-lookin' wife, too, for them as likes

yalla hair.' But Buck vowed he couldn't be mistook."

"That's men for ye." The other woman heaved a windy sigh. "Pity she's such a dumb Swede. Else maybe she might coax him back."

Marilka sat perfectly still. Not a muscle flinched in her face. But the heart within her turned to leaden agony.

At last the train wheezed into the Landing. Smith was waiting, with the launch. She talked to him pleasantly, the hour's trip up-river. Once at the dredge, she put on her working-clothes, and made her usual methodical inspection of the machinery. That ended, she rowed up the hot dark canal to her own cabin-boat.

She crept into her steamy little bedroom. She slid off her big muddy boots, took off her despised knickers and hung them up, slipped on a fresh wrapper, and took down her hair. Then she caught sight of herself in the little mirror. She looked steadily at that white face, framed in great silky yellow waves.

" 'A fine, black-haired girl—' " she said, dully.

Suddenly she threw herself on the floor and crouched there, her hands gripped over her breast. She did not cry nor moan. Only she lay there, minute after minute, her mouth bitten in, her body drawn tense as wire. Pulse on pulse of fury shook her like a leaf in a gale.

All at once she pitched back, limp. For a time, she lay so exhausted that she could no longer suffer.

At last she staggered up and threw herself across the bed. It was gray dawn before she stirred.

The days sped on. Marilka worked now like a machine. She had found her stride. She could force the job to the highest possible speed. Every Saturday night, she sat and fairly gloated over the Inspector's reports. Yard by yard, dollar by dollar, she was creeping up on Tim's heaped debts.

"We will not break efen, Tim," she would say, in the deep mother-note that thrilled always from her lips when she spoke her own man's name. "But we will not be so far in de hole but what we can crawl out. When you come back, you shall find de boats still yours, my man. Und this time anoder year, you shall be captain of your own fleet, my man!

"He will be all in rags, my poor boy," she would croon. And her face would glow with mother-light, and her soft cheeks burn to rose. But now and again that radiance would dim. Then she would put down her work, and stare out into the night, her eyes dark with bitter pain. Out past the tree-walled canal, out past the black sluggish river, away, away.

During the summer, two more letters came from Tim, both forwarded from Chicago. Both contained money—and nothing more.

Late in August, Megan stopped in on his monthly round. His keen eye took approving note of the work. Then he looked at Marilka. Her grave white

face, her thin body: her restless hands: her restless eyes, always looking past him, down the river and away.

Megan chewed hard on his pipe. Megan was fifty years old, as hard-mouthed, two-fisted an old tarrier as ever jawed a cranesman. However, he was wise with a deep and gentle wisdom. Blinking, steady-lipped, he spoke out, like the grim tender old surgeon he was.

"Ye've done fine and dandy, Ma'am. Well, I hope Tim's enjoyin' his vacation. Sure, he needed it. He's worked like a galley slave, these five years. High time he took a day off."

Marilka turned to him sharply. Frightened joy lit in her eyes.

"Then—you tink——"

"I think Tim will turn up by fall, right as a trivet, Ma'am. He's got the rovin' foot, that's all."

Marilka flushed crimson. Her eyes exulted.

"Then it is true, like I myself believe! It is on'y that Tim has run away, like a little boy, to see de world! But I——" And for once, Marilka's tortured heart spoke aloud—"I feared it was—me. I am never good enough for my man."

"You not good enough!" Megan chuckled. Then he spoke out, with the wisdom of angels.

"Hark ye, Ma'am. I mind me first wife, Rosy. True she was, as the minted gold, an' kind, an' sweet, and purty as pink clover, an' the grandest cook iver seen. Ye'd think I'd a' been the contentedest

man in the Three Kingdoms. Was I, indeed? Sure, the day never dawned but I was a' tinkerin' at me sthratagems to slip away from her. But no sooner did I get me fill of strange sights an' doin's than me heart was broke to get back to me girl. So goes it wid yer own Tim. Off he's cut, like a spalpeen follyin' the circus. 'Tis the world's circus that he's starvin' for to see, an' all its signs an' wonders. But give him a month more, say, an' he'll be that hungered f'r yer sweet face, that all the world's circuses can't keep him away. Mind that, now!"

Marilka did not need that command. For weeks she clung to Megan's words. Yet she knew dark days when even that heartening promise mocked her, and she fought through her work like a creature chained to a treadmill, whose every step was marked in blood.

Lamson watched her keenly those days. Lamson was always watching. Silent, steady, alert, he never put himself forward. Yet he never once failed her.

Late in October, the long pull eased. They had caught up with the contract. No dread of forfeitures haunted Marilka now.

Ten miles up-river, a show-boat had tied up, and was giving vaudeville of unequalled grandeur. Both crews petitioned for an afternoon off. Marilka promptly granted it.

"You go too, Lamson," she urged. "I stay and watch de boats."

Lamson scowled.

"I don't like leavin' you alone in these woods. Too risky."

Marilka laughed at him. But Lamson hung back, growling. Only his dread of the men's chaff sent him away at last, sulky and perturbed.

Marilka waved the men gaily away. Then she took her sewing and sat on the dredge deck. The autumn wind blew soft as down; river and woods slept in Indian summer haze. But Marilka felt queerly restless. It was absurd, she thought, to fidget so. Surely she was as safe here, ringed in marsh and forest, as in a cloister.

Suddenly she glanced ashore. What she saw there tore the breath from her lungs and turned her blood to ice.

Half hid by the willows, a man was prowling noiselessly down shore. A white man, bare-footed, in jeans trousers and a torn shirt: towsleheaded, brawny, a giant. Marilka could not see his face: but that skulking gait told enough.

"Und my gun, she's under my pillow in de cabin-boat." Death-sick, her whole flesh quaking, Marilka started across deck. The forward hatch stood open: an instant, the thought came that she might drop down, pull the hatch shut, then hide herself in the hold. But she gripped her reeling wits and took another step.

"Hi, there! Stop, you!"

The man sprang through the willows and strode across the gangplank. Marilka stopped as if shot.

The tramp stood looking at her intently. His broad dirty face turned slowly red. His piggy eyes sparkled.

"You're the woman that's bossing this job. I've heard tell of ye." He nodded. "An' yer men have all gone to the show. Reckon you might get me a bite. I've hoofed it a good way."

"Food?" Marilka smiled. To be sure. She would go to the quarter-boat to fetch it. Once there, she could spring ashore, run to her own boat, and snatch her automatic. She started towards the plank.

The tramp wheeled instantly and stepped in front of her.

"Where you going?"

"To de quarter-boat. To bring you food."

"Oh. Well—" He stood back and studied her, a long appraising stare. An indescribable look came into his face: a profound bestial satisfaction: he fairly licked his chops. "Well—don't know's I'm so hungry, after all. Wait."

That look of his struck tearing through Marilka's body and clutched like a huge unclean hand. But she could not stir. As in a nightmare, that staring face came closer, closer. Before she could breathe, he had leaped on her and grasped her tightly round the waist.

Then Marilka came to herself. She screamed and fought like a tigress. But the tramp had her. She knew that. He had pinned her left arm tight against her breast. He was struggling to drag down her

fighting right arm. He clutched it, wrung her wrist hideously, then dragged her backward towards the engine-cab.

Marilka wrenched and jerked and twisted. His grip tightened, crushed her like an arm of steel. His panting evil face pressed against her throat.

A frenzy seized Marilka. She swung her arms free and brought both fists down on his head and shoulders in a rain of blows. Cursing with pain, the man ducked and snatched savagely at her hammering fists. A crazy hope flashed through Marilka's brain. The forward hatch was not six feet away. And it was still open.

That thought poured strength into her. She thrust and beat and pounded, urging their two bodies towards the hatch. The tramp dodged and doubled, yet every instant he held her tighter and more cruelly secure. However, he had not caught her hands yet. If——

The tramp's heel struck the hatch coaming. He stumbled, swayed. Marilka threw herself forward, fairly on him. Her hands clutched the coaming on the farther side and held like a vise.

The tramp pitched backward. With a shriek, he let go Marilka, snatched out wildly. He caught only empty space. Screaming, he crashed to the floor of the hold.

Marilka dragged herself to her knees. She stared down at the tramp, already struggling to his feet. Then she slammed the hatch shut and bolted it.

Next, she dropped flat on the boards, and lay there, all but senseless. Her dress hung round her in shreds. Dark bruises puffed on her arms. Her breast rose and fell in strangled gasps.

Presently she sat up and fastened her torn blouse. Her burning cheeks cooled. Her face took on its grave imperial calm.

From below came muffled but sulphurous yowls, explaining in harrowing detail precisely what the tramp meant to do, once he laid hands on her. Marilka considered. At length she put her lovely mouth to a crack in the hatch door.

"First catch your rabbeet," advised Marilka, in her voice of slow music. "Your policy now, Bill, is to watchfully wait."

Bill waited. When the crew came home, he would have been glad to wait even longer. Refreshed and rambunctious, the crew asked no more delightful task than to barbecue the scallywag on the spot.

"Make dem stop, Lamson," commanded Marilka, half-laughing, half-alarmed, as the crew swarmed blustering round the hapless scallywag.

"Make 'em stop, hey?" blazed Lamson. His fists knotted: his dour eyes grew bloodshot. "Leave them do what they please with him, ye mean. Once I lay hands on him, I—I'll rip the houn' dog's heart out!"

"Why, Lamson!" Marilka's mouth fell ajar. She turned from him to the men. With sharp authority, she ordered them to take the tramp to the Landing,

and hand him over to the constable. As the launch started away, she went back to Lamson.

"Lamson, are you seeck? You look so white, so mad at me——"

"Mad!" Lamson took one stride to her. All his glum quizzical defenses went down in that shaken cry. "Mad at you? Marilka! You darling lovely blockhead! Can't you see that I love you? Love you better than my own life?"

Marilka stood, blank. Lamson did not lay a hand on her. But his voice was like the clasp of passionate arms.

"Marilka! You faithful, brave girl, don't you know that Briarley won't never come back? He's quit you cold, precious. He won't never come again. The fool has deserted ye fer good and all. The courts will give you your divorce, any minute. Then you can marry me, that very week, if you will. I ain't nigh fit for you, Marilka," his voice shook with humble worship. "No man could ever be fit for you, you white saint. But I've got a piece of land back in Kentucky, and some money, too. And I'll sure be good to you, Marilka. I'll sure take care of you, my sweet!"

Marilka looked deep into that rugged burning face.

"I tank you, Mister Lamson." Her words came between hard pauses. "You mean to be kind. You are always kind to me. But you forget. I am Tim

Briarley's woman. I belong to him for always. Und he is my own man. Forever and forever."

"But look at the way the skunk has treated you!" Lamson choked.

Marilka's lip quivered. But a deep glow lighted in her eyes.

"No, Mister Lamson. My man is not no skunk. My man has gone away. He will come back to me when it is time. I can only wait."

Lamson opened his mouth. Then he shut it again. He might as well pound his head against the wall, as argue against that royal faith.

"All right, then. True woman ye are, Marilka. 'My man will come back to me.' Sure, they always say that. Mother ye are to Briarley, more nor wife. 'Tis the way of a real woman, the round world over. Well—so long as you count yourself Briarley's own woman, you don't want a man on the job what's been makin' love to you. So I'll be going. To-morrow."

Marilka heard him out. Then she spoke, very gentle and grave.

"As you think best, Mister Lamson. Only—you have been my great help. Und now——"

Lamson followed her eyes to the ragged little fleet, the unfinished ditch. He shrugged his shoulders, with a helpless laugh.

"Oh, the job! Of course I can't go. I'm not quite such a four-flusher as to quit you in this fix. Yes, I'll stay by, Marilka. You can count on me."

Marilka felt dimly obliged. She utterly failed to realize what this stay would cost Lamson. His help would enable her to finish the contract on time: Tim's contract. That was all she knew or cared.

That month, Marilka worked as never before. A small additional piece of digging was advertised. Marilka put in bids, and to her delight, won it at a fair figure.

"But what put the notion in yer head, girl?" scolded Megan. "To bid on another contract, when ye're still toilin' to finish this one!"

"But this one will hardly break efen, Mister Megan. While, if I put de new job through, I stand to clear a little money. Then, think! When Tim comes back, und finds he will not lose his dredges, und that he has a little money, efen! Think how glad I can make my man!" Her eyes shone.

"For sure Tim will be glad—when he comes back," Megan agreed. Later, he reported that talk to Big Chief. Big Chief listened, with a queer faraway stare. Big Chief had been married for twenty years to a beautiful and competent lady, who drove him with a curb-bit. When Megan had made an end, he threw back his fine gray head with an odd rebellious gesture.

"So she'll take this new job, a rough mean one at that, 'To make glad my man.' Well, Megan—there's wives: and there's wives."

"Thrue fer ye, sir." Megan's gaze bent on the

far horizon. "'Tis meself shud know that. Doin' time, as I am, wid me third."

For Marilka, those last November days of worry and strain and fierce unending toil outweighed in misery all the long summer that had passed. Megan's promises had given her fresh hope; but Lamson's bitter outbreak rang always in her ears. What if Lamson was right? What if Tim had gone away, for always? Her Tim! Her own man! Her beloved, defiant little boy!

Night after night, she would creep back to her boat, spent and exhausted by her long laboring day, to lie there, wide-eyed, hour on hour, torn between her belief in her husband, and a strange new, growing resentment. For Megan had said it: the mate-anger was waking now, in Marilka's deep heart. Slow, that waking: but terribly powerful, terribly sure.

Desperately she fought that rising flame. She worked longer and longer hours, she threw herself into tasks that taxed even her glorious young strength. But it only grew the swifter, that ruthless soul-consuming fire.

Late one sleety twilight, she dragged herself aboard her boat, and into her dark chilly kitchen. She had been at work since gray dawn. Her blue eyes shone with fatigue, her cheeks burnt crimson. She was wet to the skin: even her strong body swayed as she bent to light the fire.

There came a heavy foot on the step, a crashing

knock at the door. Before she could turn, the door banged open. In sprang a huge snow-coated figure, and snatched her up into mighty arms.

"Marilka! Marilka! My love, my darling! Oh, my girl, my own girl!"

Marilka's heart gave one wild leap. Then it sank leaden in her breast. Her breath failed in her throat. Her whole body was turning to lead now. Then that blasting anger leaped up and wrapped her in a net of flame.

Tim's arms locked her close. Tim's kisses beat down on her stiff lips. Tim's voice was sobbing against her cheek.

"Marilka, darling, darling! I've come back to you. I couldn't stand it another hour. Oh, my blessed, my own girl!"

She lay in his arms like a dead thing. But Briarley, wild with joy, knew nothing but his own delight. At last he put her down, lit the lamp, then knelt and clasped her again and looked up into her beautiful moveless face.

"You love! But you're so white, so thin! My brave woman!" He choked. "To think of ye, takin' this brute job, an' runnin' it the whole summer through, the little plucky toilin' fool ye are! An' I never heard one word at all, till I got me back from the mountains, yesterday."

"Back from the mountains?" Marilka's numb mouth stumbled on the words.

"Yes. For it's far on the heights I've been, this

livelong year. Oh, Marilka!" His voice dropped, reverent. His eyes began to shine. "The glory of it! To get away from this weary low country, to that great grand roof of the world! Oh, it was wicked to leave you, like I did, Marilka. I know that. But—I had to get away. I had to get off an' breathe. Ye'll never understand, girl, I know that. But—Marilka, I *had* to go!"

Marilka stared at him. Somehow this was another man from the fagged sullen youngster of that far March morning. He was taller, bronzed, aglow. His big body swung, elastic. He breathed of the clean wind on high spaces. He was as one who has drunk deep of immemorial springs.

"And oh, Marilka, the wonders I have seen!" His face was suddenly a child's face, triumphant, yet wistful for the glories he had known, and left behind. "The great still lakes, bluer than the blue heavens above them, and the burnt ghost-forests on the hills, an' the white peaks, a' springin' high an' higher, till they'll mount each others' shoulders, playin' leap-frog intil the sky!"

Then the Question clacked aloud on Marilka's dry tongue.

"Und de people, Tim? Were they also wonderful? What of that—that fine black-haired girl?"

"Black-haired what?" Tim looked up, puzzled. "What you joshin' about, Marilka? What d'ye mean?"

Marilka caught her breath. That look of utter

blank bewilderment sent the blood racing through her veins, lifted the leaden weight from her breast. Her flesh felt like a bubble blown of light and fire. Yet she spoke it out again.

"That woman. That black-haired girl——"

Tim laughed out, then. His arms drew her closer still.

"Blessed little silly! What whim has took ye, say? Why, the world is chock-full of women-folks, Marilka, black an' tow an' sorrel-top. But never a golden head like yours, girl." His sinewy hand stroked the great silver-gold braids. "An' never a girl like you."

Marilka's eyes dropped shut. That tide of joy poured through her, a healing ecstasy.

Suddenly she laughed out, very softly. Her cheeks burned, rose-red. Her blue eyes shone. Her lips quivered with the tenderest mirth: the mirth of the mother who looks on her grimy shame-faced runaway little son.

"I should worry that you would look at anoder woman!" said Marilka, in her voice of slow music. "Go, now, make yourself warm und dry, heart's beloved, while I cook you some hot supper, und bring you out a clean new shirt. Look at that torn sleeve, bad boy!" Again that low glad laughter rippled, full of joyous self-scorning. "'A fine, black-haired girl!' Haf I not said it, always, that you haf runned away, to see de world, yust like the little bad child you are? Haf I not known it, always, that you would come back—to me?"

OF MEXICO

BILLY FOSTER AND THE SNOW QUEEN

CASA EMBURY.
Tlalpam Road. (Ten miles out of Mexico City, ninety million miles away from West Newton and civilization and you.)
September twenty-second. 1915.

DEAR MOLLY:

Very like, you'll never see this letter. Now that we have three Presidentes, all governing Mexico at once, nine-tenths of our letters are censored, or dynamited while on the trains, or merely dropped by the wayside, before they reach Vera Cruz. But writing to you helps to let off steam.

Poor Mexico! The real true Mexico—by which I mean the thousands on thousands of decent, toiling peons, and the great mass of law-abiding civilians—still struggles along; patient, starving, silent. Their poor little farms are stripped. Their poor little shops and houses are despoiled. They live on, Heaven knows how, in the face of misery past describing. Meanwhile, the three factional armies, Carranzistas, Zaps, and Villistas, wrestle for control, and at their heels wander the gangs of bandits, "men of the mountains," as the peons call them,

whose thieving and looting have terrorized the whole country. Casa Embury, which is to say, Jim, and myself, and our three kiddies, and our manservants and our maidservants, are right in the thick of the scrimmage, as usual. We're safe enough, thanks be, for this huge, solidly built house and its walled garden could withstand a siege. But after six years of revolutions, they really begin to pall. I'm getting so case-hardened that, night before last, when I awoke at midnight to a flight of hoofs and a clatter of wild shots, I didn't even shake Jim awake. Instead, I dropped off again, with hardly a blink. But three hours later, I woke with a start, and sat up in the blackness, my heart leaping. Distant shouts: a faint pop-pop of rifles; then—long, dull, far-away thunder. Cannon.

"Jimmy!" I had him by the hair, double-quick. "Bombardment! The city! Wake up!"

"Lemme 'lone," begged Jim, from slumbrous depths. "Nothin' but cannon——"

"But, Jimmy——"

"Ten miles 'way—s'long's they don't die on our doorstep——"

Just there, the telephone rang, madly. I pulled the sheet over my head, while Jim arose and answered it, majestically calm.

"Yes, this is Embury. Sure, we get a mild echo out here. Carranzistas attacking the suburbs, eh? And Zaps training cannon on 'em? Bosh, no danger in town, Hosmer. They never hit anything. Oh,

she's afraid they'll swing their artillery inside, and rake the city? Why, come out, to be sure. Delighted. Yes, the Masons, too. And the Bradfords. And the Van Alstynes. And Colonel Atterbury. The more the merrier, old man. Bring the servants, too, if you think it advisable——"

Right there, I jerked the sheet off my head, and stepped out into the cold Mexican darkness that is so particularly cold and dark at three A.M.

"Here," said I, grimly, "is where I get up." For I knew well enough what that chin-chin meant. It was the Hosmers and the Masons and the rest of our very special crowd, scared-to-death for fear that the city would be swept by cannon, as it was three years ago, when Diaz and Huerta slashed away at each other, and laid the whole city under a rain of fire. They were all scurrying away to our casa, whirling out in the high-powered cars that all our friends keep, nowadays—and keep in racing trim, you better believe. They were bringing their wives, and their children, and maids, and whatever clothes and valuables they could snatch up. They'd reach the casa in less than an hour, chilled, and frightened, and wanting hot baths, and breakfasts, and sympathy, and nobody knows what all. Yes, that was where I got up.

I called up my drowsy startled maids, and Anina, the cook, and Peter Grimm, the mozo, and got out extra linen and silver, and lighted grate fires, and unlocked the cupboards, and measured out supplies

for thirty people, instead of our usual twelve. Forty minutes later, the Assyrians tore down on us like wolves on the fold. Sleepy scared wolves, poor dears, the children crying, the women very white, the men looking worried and foolish, both at once. The two Van Alstynes, the Hosmers with their two children, the Masons with their three, the Bradfords with four. Also Colonel Atterbury, that vociferous old turkey-cock, blustering loudly against this ignominious retreat—"When I recall my record in the Philippines, Madam, I feel that this flight is disgraceful! Disgraceful!" Also a handful of maids, and the four mozos of the four households, who were afraid to stay, and rode out on the running-boards. Also Betty Mason's white rabbits, and Cassandra, Mrs. Van Alstyne's idolized Persian cat, and Mrs. Hosmer's chow, who promptly routed out Jim Junior's collie pup, and called him names. I ordered poor Frolic tied up in the garage, but my eagle eye foresees trouble.

But I'm saving my one real thrill for the last. Prepare yourself, my child. Also they brought—Guess who? But you never could guess. It's too amazing, too far past belief. Miss Eleanora Huntingdon, *if* you please! Eleanora Huntingdon, of Beacon Hill, Boston, daughter of all the Huntingdons of history! The girl whose portrait by Sargent was the marvel of the Academy two years ago, the beauty of two continents! The most admired American débutante that ever made her curtsey to

the Court of Saint James, so they say. According to the Hosmers, she can take her choice of all the belted earls of Christendom. This identical moment, she is supposed to be hesitating between a very clever and popular Englishman, of high degree—the Honorable Augustus Boice-Poppleham, no less—and an even more fascinating Austrian officer. Do you wonder that I saved her for my climax?

She's a cousin of the Hosmers, you know. She came to Mexico City three weeks ago, via Vera Cruz, "in search of a little diversion," as she puts it, in her slow clear tranquil young voice. And now that the Villistas have ripped up the railroad, she has no chance to get away. A Beauty, do you ask? The loveliest fair grave princess that ever the sun shone on.

Well! When I saw that imperial young creature come drifting into the sala, I turned as limp as if I found myself called on to entertain Royalty, in very truth. She was in evening dress, at that, a gleaming silver thing, with emeralds on her throat, and glistening in her wheat-gold hair, for she had been dining at the Brazilian ambassador's, till very late. Returning, through streets suddenly choked with soldiers, "I really didn't care to go to bed. And when the alarm came, I had no time to change."

Humbly I ventured to offer her a middy blouse and skirt of my own, which she graciously accepted. Being goddess-tall, my clothes made her look a lovely gawky sixteen. That made her more

human, somehow. And I must say that our princess has some mundane tastes. Anina, the jewel, had delicious toast and coffee and omelette for us, and she ate like a ravenous young Amazon. Heavens, how the whole crowd ate! I rejoiced to see them enjoy their food, but I fervently hope they don't stay as long as they did the last bombardment! Bless their hearts, they nearly gobbled us out of house and home. Yes, I know I sound like a skinflint. But with eggs at twelve cents apiece, and bacon a dollar a pound, Mexican hospitality comes high.

I gave my refugees the west wing, and made them as cozy as I could. The babies were tucked into bed, pronto. But nobody else cared to go upstairs. Instead, we sat around the big fire in the sala, and told stories, and cracked jokes, and tried to be gayly oblivious to the gray fog dawn outside, and the wind that rattled the palms like dry bones, and the far mutter of cannon, like thunderous angry surf. But after dreary æons, the cannon stopped. Then the sun came up, a red autumn sun, and the world was all warm and peaceful, and the sky all dreaming blue. We women went out into the patio, and kept up our gay determined chatter, while the men wandered around, sulky and restive. They were all feeling good and sheepish by this time, you see. And they longed to sneak back to the city, and see how things were going. Yet they knew very well that their assembled womenfolk would take the

roof right off the sala, if they dared cock an eye towards the high-road.

The sun mounted higher. We women gabbled stoutly on. The babies were brought downstairs, a wide-eyed crew. Miss Eleanora, a beautiful calm hoyden in my faded old middy suit, sat on the grass with my Emily Ann on her knee, and played mumble-peg with Jim, Junior. Outside the gates, the long white Tlalpam road stretched empty and deserted. Not a peon came by. Not a lone soldier, even. Back in the courtyard, the servants huddled and whispered. A queer unearthly waiting tautened our very flesh. But suddenly Jim, who was prowling near the gate, let out a yell of ecstasy.

"Billy Foster! Milk-wagon, and pie-bald nags, and all! You bully old scout! March along in, and let me shake your hand, my brave. Entrez! Pronto! Hike!"

Everybody jumped up and raced down to the gates, with shouts of joy. Even our starched Mrs. Hosmer put down her chow's leash, and ran. Everybody but the Princess Eleanora. Naturally, the Princess Eleanora had never met Billy Foster, the American Colony's beloved milkman. Instead of rising, she sat back on her heels, and looked at him. Billy Foster, great brawny apple-cheeked bruiser, is quite worth looking at. He stood beaming beside his ancient yellow cart, a lusty young son of Anak in his dingy khaki. We fell on his neck, with

hugs and handshakes and eager questions of the night before.

"What's all this? Refugee camp, eh?" His eyes danced at the abashed faces. "For sure I'm making my milk-route. My folks will be all the hungrier, after staying up all night, to watch the fireworks. Bombardment? What's a bombardment to us husky sons of toil? Yes, a pack of Villa's tin soldiers hung around my shack all night, and ran off two of my cows. I'm going to headquarters this afternoon, and threaten to call out the dreadnoughts, if they don't give my bossies back. You fellows come along and watch the fun. You—whoop! Will you look at *that!*"

I reckon Frolic hadn't been chained up any too securely. Chip on shoulder, smarting with injury, Frolic came ramping down the patio. And Mrs. Hosmer had laid down her chow's leash, not one minute before.

The chow stood up. His back bristled: his eyes lit with green sinister fire.

Frolic eyed him. From Frolic's silky throat came a single guttural challenge. The two dogs leaped clear: with a thud, the heavy bodies struck, and rolled across the patio, bared teeth at each others' throats.

That wasn't a mere dog-fight. It was a cataclysm. Jim Junior later described it as "one roaring, whizzling, Catherine Wheel of pup." That's

as far as words can go. It was terrific. It was sublime.

We women shrieked and scrambled on chairs. The men stood gaping, horror-struck. Nobody lifted a hand to interfere. We stood and stared, as if turned to stone.

Then from the kitchen came a howl of fury. Out waddled Anina. Anina loves Frolic with her whole soul. Puffing, squealing, down the patio she floundered, a steaming kettle clutched in one fat hand. Straight towards that writhing scramble, she sped. Then out rang a high imperious voice.

"Put that kettle down. Don't you dare scald them. *Get* out of my way!"

Headlong across the patio dashed Miss Huntingdon. Headlong she plunged into the fray. She gripped Frolic's big shoulders with both hands: fingers knit in his ruff, she tore him from the chow. Both dogs turned on her savagely. She flung her whole weight on Frolic, and forced his snapping head down, then knocked the chow flat with one powerful swing. Instantly the dog was up again, and at her.

"Get the hose, somebody!" "No, red pepper." "Pedro, my revolver! Run!"

Right then, the men awoke. They charged on the struggling heap. But Billy Foster got there first. With one stride, he landed in that riot. He grabbed the chow by the throat, and snatched him

backward. Simultaneously Miss Eleanora, hands tangled in Frolic's heaving back, yanked him.

The dogs let go. They let go just a breath quicker than anybody expected. With a startling bump, Billy Foster sat down flat on the patio floor, the frenzied chow held high in his arms. With an answering bump, Miss Eleanora landed equally flat on the turf, with Frolic squirming on her lap.

The servants snatched the dogs away. We hustled Miss Eleanora and Billy to their respective feet. They were jolted, but calm. They acknowledged my gurgling introduction with ineffable poise. Blessed are the peacemakers who can rule their own spirits, even when they've been making a spectacle of themselves.

"Some scrap," gasped Billy Foster. Then his voice died away in the hush of utter amazement. He looked at Miss Eleanora, serenely winding her tumbled braids around her head. His laughing face grew suddenly grave: his keen eyes darkened with awe. A full minute, he didn't speak. Only he looked and looked at her, and his face flushed slowly crimson, and his eyes lightened and flashed, as if her beauty went to his head like wine.

Well, I reckon the beautiful Miss Huntingdon has seen that swift awe waken in a thousand men's eyes. She smiled back at him, goddess-calm.

"Quite some scrap," she agreed, in her clear gentle voice.

"Hope the pups didn't take a nip out of you

anywhere." Billy spoke slowly, his eyes still fixed upon her face. Quite absently, he crowded a large bleeding thumb into his mouth, and sucked it tenderly.

"Not a nip. But your poor thumb——"

Billy came to himself. He removed the thumb with some force.

"Oh, I say, 'scuse. Guess I'll hit the trail. Time I got my limousine headed for town." With one last wide-eyed unbelieving stare, he bolted through the gate, sprang into his jingling cart, and clattered away.

Miss Eleanora looked after him, fair, serene.

"A milkman? An ordinary vaquero?" she queried. "Really, now——"

At that, the whole refugee troop fell on her. Billy Foster's life history was hurled at her fair head. A common vaquero! Our darling Billy! Listen. Billy Foster came down from Detroit five years ago, with a brand-new diploma from the University of Michigan, and a comfortable half-million from his father's estate. The said half-million, he had invested in silver mines in Chihuahua, and in two enormous cattle ranches near Mexico City. Immediately upon the fall of Madero, Huerta's foragers had pounced on his cattle, and had stripped his fields and his ranch-houses. That identical week, a troop of brigands swooped down from the mountains upon his mines, killed half his workmen and drove away the rest, and destroyed what machinery

and supplies they could not carry off. Billy had promptly hotfooted it to Huerta, and had demanded restitution. Much good it did him. He has been demanding it ever since, from one revolutionary leader after another. He's tangled up in lawsuits with five separate administrations. Not one peso has been restored to him. Meanwhile, to earn his daily bread, he has taken up a small rancho, eight miles east of our own, and has started a dairy farm. He works like a peon, he does everything, from tending his cattle to driving the milk-wagon. "And maybe the American Colony isn't grateful to him! The only decent milk we can buy in all Mexico!" "Some game kid, Billy Foster. Mind that!"

"Quite interesting," murmured Miss Eleanora, when we had made an end. Very sedately she sat down on the turf, pulled my Emily Ann to her knee, and began to play mumble-peg again. The sunshine lit her mass of yellow hair to flame. Wreathed in that aureole, her face was ivory, her eyes speedwell blue, her fair brows level, saintly. In my skimp little middy suit, her beautiful calm face bent above my baby's face, she looked like a grave young angel, stepped down from a Gothic window, all fire and rose and pearl.

"I'll bet you my dessert at dinner to-night," she said placidly to Jim, Junior, "that you can't shut your eyes and pull that peg out of the ground with your teeth, three times running."

Well, I'm glad that Billy Foster had this one glimpse of the loveliest girl in America, to carry with him through his toiling day. Of course they two will never meet in the States. Poor Billy, gentleman born though he is, will never win his way to Miss Huntingdon's far, lofty world. Yet he can always say that he once met Miss Eleanora Huntingdon. At a Mexican dog-fight. And helped her break it up.

CASA EMBURY.
September twenty-ninth.

DEAR MOLLY:

Were you ever in a theatre panic? Then you know how the air feels here, day after day, week after endless week. We're like people driven through some queer inferno. We neither work nor rest. We're blown on and on, by a wind of doubt and fidget and fear. That shows itself in the behavior of my bombardment house-party. They're ashamed to stay and quarter on us. Yet with Mexico City swarming with wrangling soldiery, they'd rather be ashamed, than go back to stay. Moreover, after all these months cooped up in a Revolution, we Colony folks are a bit edgy. Colonel Atterbury, our self-made hero, as Jim calls him, bores us from morn till dewy eve with his impassioned bellowings for intervention: "When I look back on my record in the Philippines, Madam, then see myself rusting here! It is a crime, Madam, a crime!" Worse, he has broken up a five years' friendship with Mr.

Hosmer, over bridge. And Mrs. Hosmer and Mrs. Mason have quarrelled over a crochet pattern. And Ramon, the Colonel's chauffeur, fell in love with Conchita, my house-girl, whereat Pedro, her betrothed, stuck a knife into Ramon behind the bougainvillea hedge, last night. Ramon isn't fatally hurt, and he cheerfully promises to hand Pedro his, as soon as circumstances permit. Betty Mason tumbled off the portico roof this morning, trying to play Zeppelin with my one and only pretty parasol, and broke her collar-bone, and smashed the parasol to bits. While we were wailing over her, Buster, her twin, scooped all the goldfish out of the fountain with a sieve, and fed them to Mrs. Van Alstyne's Cassandra, which made her most horribly sick. With fine impartiality, Mrs. Van Alstyne blames the whole house-party, which does not make for harmony.

As for me, waves and billows of calamity have rolled over my head, but, as Jim says, Calamity is my natural element. Last Monday, the Argentine minister came to luncheon, very informally. (Jim is a sort of unofficial adviser of his, you know.) We're scraping the flour-barrel nowadays, as all stores are closed, and we can't buy supplies, but by murdering our six last surviving chickens, Anina managed to plan a halfway decent meal. Just at lunch-time, Mario, the Hosmer's majordomo, rode over from their ranch, for orders. Now it seems that at a dance, a fortnight since, Mario ungallantly

bolted two dances with Anina, and devoted himself to a younger and fairer damsel. When he entered the court-yard, Anina was frying the sacrificial chickens. She saw Mario coming; she didn't waste any time in vain reproaches. She left those chickens sizzling in the hot lard, seized a potato-masher, and sailed in. She landed two terrific whacks, before the astonished Mario realized his peril. When he did wake from his trance, he let out one anguished yelp, leaped on his pony, and set off for his home ranch at top speed. Anina waddled after him to the gate, hurled the potato-masher after him, and called down a parting malediction fit to chill your blood. Then she planted herself in a chair, and wept tears to turn a mill. In the excitement, the chickens burned to a coal-black crisp—the only meat dish in our larder—or for miles around. Distractedly I opened our one last lonely can of sardines, while Anina wailed on, and the sympathizing maids dished up a scorched and fragmentary meal. The minister ate it like the hero he is, while Jim and I sat and writhed. Naturally, Mario won't return for those orders in a hurry. And the Hosmers wonder gently why I cannot maintain better household discipline.

To-day my pantry shelves are bare. We have a little flour; two sacks of beans; a box of dried peaches. That's absolutely all. Not one grain of coffee; not an egg, not a scrap of beef, not a smidgeon of butter. And nothing can we buy, for

groceries and markets are all closed and sealed, till some strong hand takes over the distracted city, and stops all looting. Thank Heaven, Billy Foster and his milk-wagon still run the gauntlet of roving troops. Blessings on Billy, the unterrified! Daily he jingles down the road, regardless of the Revolution whose cannon rock the earth beneath his feet. He and Miss Huntingdon are the only serene and normal creatures on this troubled sphere. Out of all my guests, Miss Huntingdon is the sole and only one who neither grouches, nor glooms, nor meddles with other women's husbands, nor scraps with other men's wives. Her cool, aloof young presence is my one balm in Gilead.

This morning, Jim took her and myself, with Ciro driving—all of us carrying unobtrusive but highly efficient, spunky little six-shooters — into Mexico City, for a look-see. The poor beautiful untidy City! It's like a town laid under some evil enchantment. Shuttered houses; hot silent streets; shop after shop locked, barred, sealed: a brief and cogent poster, nailed on the door, proclaimed each shop's protector: "Closed and sealed by the Consulate of Brazil"—"By the Consulate of France" —"By the Consulate of Spain." This to prevent looting. To the eye of the hostess of thirty, this was the most grievous sight of all. Nowhere could we buy supplies.

"Well, we can always fall back on our Mexican friends," remarked Jim. He swung the car out the

Avenida de Jalisco, to the house of Señor Estrada. They're the people who own the coffee-place next ours, in Orizaba, you know. The Señor was not at home, but Señora Estrada, all lacy morning-dress, and satin-smooth braids, and thickly-powdered cheeks, met us with open arms. We sat in her wide dim sala, with its chilly stone floor, its funereal rosewood furniture, its ghostly crayon portraits of Estradas past and present, and listened to the Señora's grave wise talk of her city, and its sorrows. Then we waited, while she trailed her white draperies from patio to storeroom, adjuring her maids, in that voice of melting honey. "Bring that case of canned peas, Teresa. And the firkin of new butter, and a sack of coffee. And sugar. Much sugar. Absurd! There is sufficient of sugar for our needs. And the large box of brick chocolate. And the case of potted meats. Dear Señora, I pray you, no thanks! Would you not do me a like trifling service, were I in equal straits?" And she packed our auto with goodies, and sent us on our grateful way.

"There's one phase of the Mexican situation for you, Miss Huntingdon," said Jim.

Miss Eleanora's fine eyes lighted with approval.

"Most interesting," she murmured, in her placid voice.

This afternoon, my beauteous guest met up with another phase of the Mexican situation. All our men-folk had driven into town, to an International

Committee meeting. Unknown to me, Miss Eleanora saddled Israfil, Jim Junior's donkey, and rode off down Tlalpam Road, to explore. Presently she came pelting back through the gates, her serious face flushed and eager, with a band of forty Zapatistas galloping at Israfil's heels. These soldiers were extremely tired, she explained, dashing into the patio, where I sat, aghast. Might they not halt a few minutes, for a drink of our icy-cold well-water, and a dulce or so, perhaps?

Well, I was simply scared blue. There wasn't a man on the place, except the servants. And Jim has given most stringent orders, that no soldier shall be allowed inside the gates, on any pretext whatever. But I said Yes, quaking. With half the country-side wells poisoned, it seemed too inhuman to deny them and their poor beasts. Anyway, they were already shouldering inside.

I needn't have been such a 'fraid-cat. They rode up the drive, majestic as so many barefoot hidalgos, and saluted me with dignity, then swarmed around the well, and drank, and drank, with a famished thirst. Never have I seen men snatch at water like that. It was the devouring thirst of men who have fought. Very decorously, too, they partook of the lemonade and fresh-baked bread which Anina and my fluttering maids brought out. Very courteously they bowed to me again, and set forth. I drew a long breath. It had been a shaky quarter-hour!

But right then, Emily Ann came toddling down the steps, all pink and dewy from her nap.

The whole troop stopped dead, and stared at her. The leader put out a big hairy arm, and picked her up, and wondered over her fluffy white dress, and her fat little legs in pink stockings, and her flaxen hair, which he touched cautiously, curl by curl. At last he set her down.

"Angelita," he said, very gravely and gently. Then, at a gallop, he and his ragamuffins were up-saddle and away. Somehow it made me choke all up.

"I'm glad I saw that. It was most interesting," said Miss Eleanora, in her tranquil voice.

This is a hiatus. Two hiatuses. José, my gardener, came to me, his eyes popped out on his cheeks.

"Señora! Come! Come, look upon Pedro! He is struck with death!"

"Pedro! Oh, oh! Then Ramon has stabbed him! Just as he threatened to!"

"No, Señora. Pedro is stricken by the hand of God. Alas, Señora, so sick, he can only lie and groan, and the mark of the Plague already upon his face!"

"Smallpox!" My heart dropped like lead. I suppose you think I flew to minister to the stricken Pedro. Guess again. I thought of my three babies, and my houseful of guests. I flew to the telephone, instead, and called up the American doctor. Of

course he wasn't in his office. While I stood hesitating miserably, Miss Eleanora Huntingdon swept in. She had on an afternoon frock of Chinese cluny, and a string of matched pearls, and she looked as if she'd just strolled away from a duchess's garden-party.

"Mr. Billy Foster has just sent his mozo over to say that, if I don't mind being shot at, he'll drive me over to the Country Club, to tea," she announced. "I think it will be most interesting. But José just told me about Pedro. So I'll look him over before I go."

"But, my dear child! To risk——"

"Oh, I won't catch anything. I've had some experience in sickness. Hospital extension work, you know."

"But if it should be small-pox——"

"I should like to see a small-pox case. I have never seen the real thing. It would be quite interesting."

Before I could stop her, she had floated off down the garden. In five minutes, she floated back, fair, serene.

"Chicken-pox. And a cold in his head. I promised him a whole pound of lump sugar for his supper, and he revived at once."

I was so relieved, I could only gurgle. Even as I tried to speak my gratitude, there was the screech of a siren. A motor-car fairly hurled itself through the gates. The Campbells; big ranch peo-

ple from down San Esteban way. Mr. Campbell and the chauffeur jumped out. The chauffeur's charro suit was torn half off him, and spattered with mud. Mr. Campbell was hatless, his face covered with bruises, his white clothes streaked with blood and mire. He snatched Mrs. Campbell out of the car, and came staggering up the drive.

"Bring the camphor, Anina!" I shrieked, running to meet him. "Get bandages, ice, everything!"

"Oh, she isn't shot. She's not hurt, one bit. She's just scared out of her wits," stammered Mr. Campbell. He dumped her on a bench, and leaned over her, panting. His burnt-brick Scotch face was the color of tallow, and his teeth chattered as he spoke. "There, there, old girl, I won't leave you one minute. You're safe now, old dear. Stop crying so. You're breaking me all up."

Mrs. Campbell only sobbed the harder. The chauffeur curled up on the threshold in a chalky heap. My whole household streamed out, wildly questioning.

"No, I tell you, we're not hurt. We had a—a jolt, that's all. We're—looted."

"Looted!"

"Yep. And burnt out. A crowd of bandits swooped down, a couple of hundred, I reckon. Swept up our cows and horses, carried off fodder and stores, stripped the hacienda, even to our clothes and papers, set the place afire——"

Mrs. Campbell burst into a wail.

"Carried off *everything!* Even Grandfather McCracken!"

"Carried off your grandfather——"

"His portrait, you know. By Smibert. I can bear losing the other things, but that can't be replaced, ever. And all my silver. Even to my w-wedding candlesticks!"

"I tried to reason with 'em, but they just put a bunch of guns to my head, and ordered me to take Mrs. Campbell, and be on my way. I thought I might as well. But what gets me, is the way my own vaqueros behaved." Mr. Campbell's hard jaw tightened: his eyes grew dark. "My eight Indian boys, the kids I've fairly raised by hand. They've always been so honest and so loyal. Yet——"

"Yet they helped drive off our cattle! I saw them! And Luis, our foreman, tore the silver-drawer from the sideboard, and ran with it! And Mateo, the one we've always babied so, jerked down Grandfather McCracken, and snatched my Persian rug from the library table, and galloped off, whooping like a madman! When it isn't a week since I tied up his arm, where he'd torn it on the barb-wire!"

"And not a month since I bailed the little skunk out of jail for speeding. In my own car." Mr. Campbell's face grew grim. "Well, live and learn. I've been ranching in Mexico for eighteen years. I thought I knew a square Mexican when I saw one. My boys have always been square with me.

But I give it up. They're all alike. Not a decent man among 'em. Sneaks and traitors, every one. Never you mind, Lida. We'll buck up and make a fresh start."

But Mrs. Campbell could only cling to him and cry her heart out. We helped her upstairs, and settled her on the couch in Mrs. Hosmer's room, while the maids cleared out my own room for her. Jim and I will sleep in the sala to-night. Jim will growl, too. But we're lucky, in such a deluge, that we don't have to sleep on the roof.

"I'm sorry for Mr. and Mrs. Campbell. But I wish I could have seen that raid. It must have been most interesting," observed Miss Huntingdon, deftly measuring aromatic ammonia.

Jim has just telephoned from the City that he won't be home to dinner. He is held as witness in a shooting affray. A Zap general insulted a Villista colonel in the lobby of the Iturbide. "We all ducked, and nobody got hurt, only the principals mussed each other up a bit. But it was lively while it lasted. I rolled behind a writing-desk, and one agitated gentleman climbed an artificial palm."

"I wish I had been there, to see. It must have been most interesting," mused Miss Huntingdon, at my shoulder. I turned, and looked at her beautiful tranquil face. One swift moment, I longed, with all my soul, to haul off and cuff her flawless ears. She's so accursedly Beacon Hill, so utterly distant,

so goddess-far from all our scuffling dusty world! To her, even our poor Mexico in its bitterest throes is just a great confused tragic drama. She does not comprehend. She does not pity. Her whole philosophy is summed up in that aloof, serene "Most interesting!"

Take my word for it, when Gabriel blows his trump, that girl will sit up on her tombstone, and gaze upon the scramble, and remark, with sweet aplomb: "I am glad I am here to see this. It is most interesting!"

CASA EMBURY.
October fourteenth. 1915.

DEAR MOLLY:

Two weeks since my last letter to you. And Mexico stands precisely where she stood, two weeks ago—two months ago—two years ago. The sunshine lies warm on the dusty empty country. Its fields stretch fallow, for what good, Señor, to plough and sow, where one cannot hope to reap? Its cities lie torpid; what good to buy or sell, when your tiny gains may be snatched from you to-morrow, by a new Liberator? The leaders wrangle in the Convention; the ragged brown soldiers lounge in the Plaza by day, and shoot each other up by night. To-day's Administration swaggers gayly on the Paseo; yesterday's Administration lurks sullenly outside the town, and steals cattle, and loots villages, and snatches ransoms from the rich, and strips the helpless poor.

This afternoon, praises be, my Bombardment guests have gone back to the City, to stay. I'll own I rejoiced to see their departing backs! For the week past, I've wished my guests had only one neck. Shut up even a most congenial group of people in a lonely Mexican country-house, feed them on beans and dry peaches, give them nothing to do but worry—then watch the fur fly.

The poor Campbells will stay a while longer, till they can see their way clear to making a fresh start. Also, to my vast satisfaction, Miss Eleanora Huntingdon still abides with me. She wants to see something of hacienda life, she explains. If I don't mind putting her up, she'll stay a week or so longer. Mind? She's the joy of all our hearts. Everybody on the place adores her. She romps with my kiddies like a wonderful big sister. She has taught Anina to make the most luscious doughnuts, she is coaching Jim Junior on his French, she plays poker like a cut-throat, to Jim Senior's measureless delight. She fraternizes with everybody, from the British ambassador down to the raggedest scarecrow peon who saunters by. Yet, oddly enough, we don't know her one whit better than we did the night she came. She is not just a girl and a beauty. She is, veritably, a goddess. Utterly lovely; utterly indifferent, royal, aloof. To ourselves, Jim calls her Galatea. But I call her the Snow Queen. Somehow I know that, past that white chill panoply, glow mysterious hidden fires. If ever that

flame breaks through its icy barrier, may I be there to see!

Snow-Queen or Galatea, I do long to give her a gay time. But we have no neighbors out here, and it's hard to coax guests out from the city. People do dislike being fired on. Tuesday, I asked two ornamental young German-embassy sparks to dinner. Most incautiously, they drove out in a very smart car, instead of jogging humbly in a dingy hired cab. Five miles out of the city, they met a mob of Villa men, who gaily levelled their guns, and confiscated the machine. Literally yanked it out from under them. Departing, they assured the irate youths that the walking to Casa Embury was excellent, Señors! And the scenery—magnifico!

The walking was good, but long. Five miles of dusty road were hard on pumps and tempers alike. They stayed all night, as there was so much shooting going on after nine that it seemed reckless to start back. They were very amiable about the episode, though. No wonder, with Miss Eleanora to look at! But after this, I shall fall back on Billy Foster. Luckily, she and Billy are quite pals, if a penniless young milkman can be pals with an international Beauty. Hard as Billy works, he manages to screw a little free time from each day. They play tennis on our lumpy little court, they splash in our weedy little swimming-pool, they ride together; short and cautious rides, for the roads swarm with partisan troops. It does my heart good,

to see dear Billy getting this taste of fun. Curiously enough, Miss Eleanora takes the quaintest naïve delight in all these childish pleasures. Perhaps her wealth and her beauty have always walled her away from youth. Perhaps this is her very first chance to romp, to forget her lofty destinies, and just be gay.

Last Monday, Jim took us up to the City again. Driving down the Avenida de San Francisco, we came straight upon a column of Carranza cavalry. Instantly the column parted for us, and we drove in state through the double line. I felt the gooseflesh rise on my neck. Somehow those swaggering horsemen always terrify me. Their dark faces, their long wicked guns, the dirks in their belts, their insolent laughing salutes, all unite to shake my coward heart. But Miss Eleanora waved back to them, as tranquil as you please.

"Quite like light-opera bandits," said she. "Most interesting!"

Jim had to go to a conference. We saw a movie theatre open, and decided to fill in the time there. How we exiles do snatch at the movies! With mails held up, with no newspapers, with telegraph wires down, even, the movies are like the very sight of home. I fairly shouted for joy, last month, when I saw, in a time-worn Pathé, the Army and Navy game. To-day, though, we walked into that hot, dark little box, to find it crammed to the doors—and crammed with soldiers! We were the only

women there, and, I imagine, the only civilians. 'Fraid-cat longed to slip out, but the keen pleasure on Miss Eleanora's face held me in my seat. I needn't have feared, though. The soldiers were perfectly courteous, only several of them kept loading and unloading their guns, whenever the lights went up, which got on my nerves. I must say I was glad to whirl safely down Tlalpam Road, and see our own gates swing shut behind us. Those gates are a comfort. Roving bands have twice tried to break them down, and stragglers have fired through the gratings at night, times without number. But their iron cross-bars would stand against a battering-ram.

Yesterday, Jim took the machine and drove the eighty miles to his mine, for all I wept and argued and coaxed and threatened. The country round about the mines is desolated. The machinery is ruined, the tools have been stolen, even the bunk-houses were long since stripped and ruined by passing bandits. But go Jim would, if only to look down that black hole which has swallowed up so much work, so many hopes, so many hard-earned dollars.

"I'll be back, sure pop, by sundown. That is, if the roads are all right. And if—if——"

"If the car isn't snatched from under you, and if nobody runs a knife into you, or shoots you, or pushes you down the shaft," I snivelled. But I let him go. I had to.

All afternoon, I waited, and watched and hoped —and trembled. By sundown, no husband. No message, even. I telephoned to the Calderon hacienda, where Jim had planned to stop a few minutes, on the way back. Yes, the Señor had started some hours ago. Surely he had reached home by this time? No? Then, of course, he had met with some trifling delay. Tire trouble, perhaps.

"Tire trouble!" said I, and I began to snivel again. I climbed up on our flat roof, and sat there, like a doleful Old-Testament lady, and stared out into the sunset. Presently Mrs. Campbell clambered puffing up, and sat beside me, and assured me, with a quavering chin, that Jim was all right. He would be home in no time at all. And I beamed, and agreed, and stared on. Then Miss Eleanora came, and did not say one word, but sat by me, like a straight white tower of defense. And soon my three maids, and old Juana, my laundress, came panting up, too. The maids just sat and patted the edge of my skirt, and were mercifully silent, but old Juana wasn't. She sat there in the dying glow, her black rebozo twisted round her gaunt old shoulders, and poured out horror on horror. Murder, sack, raid: all the agonies that her burning old eyes have beheld since the Revolution's first hour. My head swam. My body grew sick and faint. Believe me, Bildad the Shuhite had nothing on Juana!

The sun went down in a west all angry red. The

swift tropic night closed in. I was just about ready to lie down and die when I heard Jim's siren. I tumbled off that house-top, pronto. I all but took a Kellerman high dive. I reached the gates just as our car rolled in. Ciro was driving. Jim sat beside him. In the tonneau lay what looked like two bundles of rags.

"What on earth—" I began. Jim got out and hoisted out the bundles, without a word. Rags, they were. A boy of fourteen, with a wasted bony body, and a little weazened face, and black cavernous eyes: a little dried-up, old, old woman. Jim did not need to tell me one word.

Roving brigands had looted their hut, weeks ago. Even their tiny store of beans and corn was seized upon. Not Villa men, though, for while Villa is an accomplished looter, he has never snatched the tiny hoards of the very poor.

"I picked 'em up twenty miles west of the city," said Jim. "They'd squatted down by the roadside, to die. Plumb down and out. Starved. So near dead, they didn't half care. I hoisted them into the car, and took them on to the next huddle of huts, and paid a woman ten pesos for a pitcher of goats' milk, and poured it down them. I couldn't leave them there, though. That country is stripped as clean as a whistle. When I reached the city, I took them to the Public Refuge, but there wasn't an inch of room. They're out of everything, even blankets and tortillas. Said they could give them

a plank apiece in the courtyard, that was all. I thought we could do that much," he stopped and looked at me, precisely as Jim Junior looks at me when he brings home a new rabbit for his hutch.

"Yes, we can give them a plank, anyhow," said I.

The maids flew to make up a couple of straw beds in the roofed court, and we put a brazier there, to warm the two poor shivering bags o' bones, and brought them hot food. They ate, languidly. The boy stared at us with eyes full of dazed question, that anybody would really give them meat and white bread. But the old woman's head was clearer than his. She took the food with a haughty unconcern, and nibbled it suspiciously, her beads of eyes peering to right and left. As Jim said, she fed like an old eagle, that knows itself captive, but is ready to scratch your eyes out, the minute you take any liberties.

I went to bed last night, feeling as if we had trapped two wild things, that would fight their way out while we slept. But our foundlings were both on the spot this morning. The boy had revived completely overnight, poor chick. He actually looks as if he had already put some flesh on his poor little bones. He is down in the garden now, tagging José about, with all a small boy's eager curiosity. But the old woman sits huddled in her sunny corner, and watches us, and watches us, from under wrinkled hooded lids. She's not just a destitute old woman. She is the very spirit of old Mexico.

Torn, beaten, outraged, robbed by her own sons, tricked, despoiled. Yet never quite conquered, she crouches there: wary, patient, a chained old eagle, that will some day break its chains.

Last night, while we were fussing over our starvelings, I caught a queer new glimpse of my guest. For once in her regal life, Miss Eleanora didn't find the human comedy "most interesting." When Jim lifted those poor wretches from the car, she did not say one word. But she threw herself into serving them with a sort of frenzy. She was deft and quick and competent. Yet she fairly crooned over them. She mothered them with a passionate, brooding tenderness. Somehow it almost frightened me, to see my Snow Queen blaze alive. Evidently I was quite right. Under all that icy calm, glow living fires. Yet——

What about the Honorable Augustus? I saw a photograph of him, in a late *Graphic*. An innocuous gentleman, with a generous double chin, and the countenance of a cheerful oyster. Nobleman though he may be—can those white fires be lit for him?

Then, with that thought, came a sudden breathless recollection of Billy Foster's face, yesterday morning. Billy had halted on his route, as usual, to say Hello. Miss Eleanora calmly requested him to take her along on his milk route. "I've always wanted to see what driving a milk route would be like. It must be most interesting." So Billy had

joyfully tucked her on the front seat with him, and piled my three kiddies into the back, and had driven off in clattering state, to his half-dozen nearest customers. All morning I waited for their return, chafing with a curious miserable fear. I wasn't afraid of bandits. Not on our main highway, at ten in the morning. But I was afraid of certain things that I can't quite put into words.

Of course they did it for a lark. They're just as much children as Dorothy, and Emily Ann, and Jim Junior. And yet—never have I laid eyes on anything as lovely as Miss Eleanora, when they came jingling back. She was so sparkling, so radiant, so aglow with exquisite life. Never was there a bolder, more gallant young figure than Billy Foster, either. He's superb, if he is just a milkman. The grittiest, sturdiest, dearest youngster! But the look in his eyes, when he lifted Miss Eleanora down from the wagon, caught at my heart. If I thought I had imperilled that boy's happiness, by letting him know my Snow Queen——

Oh, well! As Jim says, I always was one of our best little crape-hangers. Do you remember what Thackeray says of me and my foreboding sisters? "Oh, these women! They nurse and coddle their ugliest presentiments, as if they were their dearest children."

CASA EMBURY.
January sixth. 1916.

DEAR MOLLY:

Do you remember the Prophet Jeremiah's doleful condemnation of those who shout Peace, peace, when there is no peace? Theoretically, Peace has brooded over Mexico since my last letter to you. Carranza has been "recognized" these three months gone. We have a brand-new American Ambassador, a brand-new entente cordiale, a dazzling new Policy of Reconstruction. Villa, Zapata, the whole array of Carranza's rival chieftains, have been driven from the City, and now sulk in their various tents. The shops are open once more—some of the time. The trains are running—by fits and starts. Even a little belated mail has trickled in. Yet mines and mills are still stopped. The roads are still perilous. Stray troops of thieves and cattle-rustlers wander through the more lonely ways, and help themselves to whatever they desire. Every day come reports of robberies of outlying haciendas. The poor peons hardly dare work in their bare little fields.

The City is still beset by its old enemies, hunger, sickness, revolt. It is a mad world, my masters, a most heartbreaking piteous world. Porfirio Diaz and the great brutal landowners of his day sowed the dragon's teeth. To-day's crop of misrule and starvation and bandits and disease is the fruit of their sowing. It'll take a long day's work to stamp out that bitter harvest!

"The United States must intervene. Only by intervention can Mexico be saved! It is our duty, as true patriots!" thunders Colonel Atterbury, from the largest cushioned chair, flourishing his julep glass in a podgy hand.

"If the United States will kindly jack up the patriots who keep on sending money and arms to Villa and the rest of the insurrectionists, Mexico will have a chance to save herself," retorts Jim. "Give the de facto government a run for its money, can't you? Look at the work we expect it to do, and do immediately, if not sooner. Carranza and his men must rebuild this nation, from its shoestrings up. They must write their country's Constitution, enforce laws—even before the laws are written,—establish a currency, reorganize the army, drive out the bandits, heal the sick, abolish poverty. Do all this by supper-time, gentlemen, demand our fatherly Interventionists, else we will see it our painful duty to come down and do it for you. Gosh! If Julius Cæsar, leading Charlemagne's armies, and toting the gold of Crœsus as a war-chest, were to tackle the reconstruction of Mexico to-day, he'd find his work cut out for him!"

"But, sir, the de facto government has proven itself mistaken in policy, abjectly incompetent——"

"Mistaken in policy? Are you dead sure that you know what Carranza's policies are? Let him have half a chance to show us. And proven incompetent—in three months' time? Be a sport,

Colonel. Give him a show. Maybe our whiskered Amigo will make good, after all."

Jim is right. To rebuild Mexico will take time, a heart-rending lot of it. Meanwhile, we outsiders must do what little we can to relieve to-day's terrible needs. Jim is chairman of the Relief Committee. He spends half his days in the endless maddening task of getting supplies up to the hungry city from Vera Cruz. He must drive his cars of grain over a half-ruined railroad, then through literal barriers of red tape. He must scatter bribes and threats like leaves of Vallambrosa. But by hook or by crook, he manages always to bring his supplies through. You know Jim. Most of our men acquaintances work on that Committee. The women help, too. Mrs. Parkinson, the Colony's one Intellectual, a severe lady who used to give Browning interpretations for her daily bread, drives about the city and its suburbs, collecting food and clothing for the Refuge, where the utterly destitute are cared for. Mrs. Bradford works like a nailer, buying, begging, all but stealing, for the wee babies in her crèche. Mrs. Van Alstyne spends her time on the forlorn old people. Mrs. Hosmer is toiling to keep up a workroom, where women can earn a few cents a day with sewing and embroidery. For my part, I go into the city three times a week, and do my bit at a Relief station; dole out scant measures of meal, and stingy lumps of lard, and charcoal by spoonfuls, to the long patient files of half-

starved women. But the most tireless worker, the wisest helper of us all, is, if you please, Miss Eleanora Huntingdon. Remember the day that Jim brought home those two poor waifs from the Mines? The sight of their misery must have melted our Snow Queen's heart. Ever since that hour, she has worked for the unfortunate with all her might. She does whatever her hand finds to do, and does it with a vim. She doles out food, she cuts out little garments for the Children's Aid, she demands —and gets—money by fistfuls from her plutocrat friends in the States, with which she buys everything from beans to quinine, from layettes to coffins. Day before yesterday, I found her in the yard back of Mrs. Hosmer's workroom. The mozo had built a fire on the bricks, and slung a gypsy kettle for her, and stood by, solemnly admiring. Miss Eleanora stood surrounded by a group of wide-eyed Mexican women. Sleeves rolled up, cheeks scorched crimson, she was teaching those women to make soap. From grease and wood-ashes. Soap is sixty cents a cake, now, by the way. Monday, Jim remarked, he met her at the express office, where she was jubilantly claiming a huge box. "Two hundred pounds of carbolic, for my emergency hospital!"

"To see her sparkle, you'd think it was two hundred pounds of Gaillard's best," said Jim.

"But why does she stay on in Mexico, Jim? She could get to Vera Cruz now. Not any too safely, yet other people manage it."

"Go ask Solomon," advised Jim.

I'd like to ask Solomon. It's beyond me. Why our beauty should choose to stay on and on, in this dusty, fever-stricken, war-trodden world! But she seems perfectly contented. She is in town with the Hosmers now, of course. Yet every week she presents herself at Casa Embury, and announces to my delight that she has come to spend a day or so. "I want to play with your kiddies," she proclaims, with my three already prancing ecstatically around her. "Please send for Mr. Billy Foster, too. I never get a glimpse of him, in town."

Peter Grimm lopes off on Israfil, to summon Billy Foster. And Billy comes, beaming, and stays till I shoo him home. They romp together like two ten-year-olds. They are as impersonal, as unemotional, as Dorothy and Jim Junior. I look on at their high-jinks, and wonder at my own silly sentiment of weeks ago. How could I imagine that there was any danger! This is Miss Eleanora's one last snatch at play-time. It is the first wholehearted irresponsible frolic that Billy Foster has had since he left college. It's up to me to give them their fling, and be thankful to see them enjoy it.

For all the worry and dread and endless strain, some droll things happen. Yesterday, I drove into town and stopped at the beautiful old house that Miss Eleanora is fitting up for her emergency hos-

pital. She was hard at work, whitewashing the great sala, but she descended from her stepladder like a goddess from a cloud, and came to greet me with imperial grace.

"So glad to see you. Won't you stop on your way back, and take me home with you for to-night?"

I promised, gladly. At six, Mrs. Campbell and I picked her up. We whirled off at a good clip, for it was close on dusk. Halfway down the lonely Tlalpam road, we saw a troop of nondescript cavalry, halted half a mile ahead.

"Let's turn around and go back," quavered Mrs. Campbell, turning pale.

"But we have our safe-conducts, with Carranza's own signature. Let's drive on. This is quite interesting," urged Miss Eleanora.

Ciro met my eye, and drove towards the troop, at a footpace. The men didn't notice us. They had crowded their horses into a ring around some object which we could not see. But as we drove closer, we saw that it was a motor-car. A big yellow car. With a lone woman seated at the wheel.

"Mercy me!" gulped Mrs. Campbell. "It—it's Mrs. Parkinson!"

Horatio J. Parkinson, all over! Driving alone, through that desolate road! And around her, hemming her in, bullying her, swarmed that hectoring wrangling crew, whose mere aspect was enough to freeze your blood.

"They're ordering her to do something. They're

trying to make her get out of the car. Oh, oh! They're trying to take it away from her! Oh, let's get away! Quick!" Mrs. Campbell implored.

"But it's a woman, alone! It's your friend! And those brigands are trying to force her out! Let's put your car alongside, Mrs. Embury. Maybe we can help."

Ciro, quite as pale as Mrs. Campbell, swung the car within twenty feet of the crowd. Mrs. Parkinson didn't even look our way. She stood erect in her car, a big blazing termagant. Her face was crimson with anger, her voice pealed like a trumpet. She doesn't know ten words of Spanish, but her English covered the ground.

"So you would take my car! Thieves! Miscreants! Remove your vile hands from my wheels. Will you dare affront me—Me! An American! A sovereign in my own country!"

(Voice from the crowd:) "If the Señora will show her credentials——"

"Credentials? I!" Mrs. Parkinson seemed to swell and grow tall. Her eyes blazed lightning. She flung out both big jewelled hands. I saw the men near her flinch, and draw their horses away. They didn't understand one word, but an angry woman needs no interpreter. "To ask *me* for credentials! Dare you think that I would condescend to show them? Insolent!"

The funniest irresolute tremor ran through the crowd. They shuffled, wavered, glanced from eye

to eye. Erect, flaming, Mrs. Parkinson glared down upon them. There was an instant of muttered conference. Then the leader pushed to the side of the car. He jerked his huge embroidered sombrero from his head.

"But the Señora forgets. Where papers are not shown, we have the right to seize all vehicles. It is for the army——"

"For the army? Bah for the army! Out of my way!"

Mrs. Parkinson gripped the wheel. With a snort and a roar, her car thrust through the mob. Instantly the men made way. Not one man tried to stop her. Even the leader snatched his mount aside. As she sped out, our car leaped forward. Four miles farther, we overhauled her in front of our own gates. She followed us up the drive, then clambered somewhat weakly from her car, and dropped down on the nearest bench.

"That's the third time to-day that I have saved that car. By making a howling fishwife of myself. After this, I shall take along credentials, and a chauffeur who can shoot straight. I've quite enjoyed bluffing them to-day, but this last time was a trifle wearing."

I should think it might have been! We kept her for dinner and the night, then sent her home under guardianship of Peter Grimm and our own passports. After this, I shall take Peter Grimm along, as well as Ciro. Peter is my right hand, my fidus

Achates. His christened name is Manuel, but Jim long since re-named him Peter Grimm, because he always comes back, no matter how often you fire him. Jim has fired him five times in the last eight months. Each time for a different offense. For getting drunk, for quarrelling with the gardener and scalding the asparagus bed in revenge, for stealing (Jim's military brushes, and six jars of bar-le-duc, and my auto goggles, and a brass desk set), for joy-riding, for letting two of the house-girls fall in love with him at once, with detrimental results, including a stabbing affray. But, no matter how wrathfully we drive him forth, within a week we set out in search of the sinner, and lead him home once more. For he certainly can manage the household staff with wizard efficiency. And act as butler, whenever we have a proud and haughty dinner-party. And run a car. And for all his little failings, he is faithful and loyal to his marrow-bones. So after this, Peter Grimm goes along.

Last night, close on midnight, we were awakened by shouts and hammerings on the great gate. As usual, I woke first, and lay in chilly dread. I hate to waken Jim; but these midnight summonses always frighten me sick. Lady Macbeth isn't the only one who shuddered at the knocking at the gate. Finally terror was too much for me. I shook up poor drowsy Jim, and begged him to fire a few shots, and drive the marauders away.

Grumbling, Jim complied. But he'd barely fired the third shot when Antonio, who was doing gate duty, came flying up the drive.

"Señor! Señor, come, I pray you! It is not soldiers who will enter. It is your friend, your well-beloved Colonel! He has been set upon by bandits, he pleads for protection——"

Jim didn't wait for more. Revolver in hand, he galloped off down-stairs.

I hung at my barred window, and peered out into the night. Soon the gate creaked open. Three dim figures entered, disappeared in the shadows of the portico. Presently there were stealthy steps. The heavy door swung to: the bolts shot. Ten long minutes: then Jim's cautious tread.

"Jim! Was it a hold-up? *Jimmy!* You'll wake the house!"

Jim had thrown himself on the bed, face down. He buried his head in the pillow. He pounded the side rail with both fists. The bed rocked like a ship at sea.

"Jim! If you don't tell me! This instant!"

"It—it's Colonel Atterbury!" Jim's voice came through eddying gasps and chortles. "He's always blowing about his record in the Philippines, you know. Pompous old wind-bag! He was on his way home from the golf dinner at the American Club. In his machine, mind you. With two loaded six shooters, right under his hand. A mile down the road, one lonesome hold-up man — *one!* — stopped

the car, and took it away from him, and ordered him to hand over all his valuables. Incidentally, he demanded the Colonel's dress-suit. And his shoes. And—well, when I met him at the gate, he was attired in pink-silk underwear, and a striped linen lap-robe. And he's the maddest retired officer south of the Rio Grande."

I could only gasp. The bed rocked on.

"I put him up in the south guest-room. And lent him a suit of clothes for to-morrow. The highwayman took his silk hat. And his wrist watch. And both guns, besides the car. When you think how the Colonel once slew thirty Moros, single-handed——"

Jim burrowed into the pillow again.

"Nemesis will get you, for making fun of your elders," I choked. And I went to sleep, to dream that thirty Moros, in raiment of pale pink silk, were holding a golf dinner in the patio.

To-day is Jim Junior's birthday. By way of celebrating, I have bought a turkey, and we'll have turkey mole for dinner, to-night. Indigestible, but luscious. Miss Eleanora is still here, and I've asked Billy Foster. Although I hardly needed to ask him, for he comes every night, anyhow, and eats everything we set before him, and enjoys himself every minute. I'm a goose to have worried over him. No danger that he will lose his sturdy heart to my goddess-beauty! He knows, too well,

that she's as far beyond his reach as the farthest, whitest star.

Jim has just come scorching home, only to dress and rush back to town. To the Corliss dinner, in honor of the President's unofficial representative. Jim must array himself, then fly, to make it on time.

Later.—

I stopped right here, for muffled howls from Jim's room announced disaster. As I reached his door, out floated an anguished wail.

"Bess! Where in blazes are my trousers? Yes, my evening ones. Gosh, of course I have two pairs, but I lent one pair to Atterbury, and he's worn 'em into town, and I can't get 'em back. In the south wardrobe? They're gone, I tell you! Vanished off the face of the earth. And I haven't another minute——"

Well, I'll spare you the details. Ten frantic minutes we hunted. Not the ghost of those trousers rewarded our search. Panting, wild-eyed, Jim suddenly turned on me.

"Bess, we can't delay another second. There comes Billy Foster up the drive, all diked out in his waiter's suit. Sprint down-stairs, and tell him to hot-foot it up here, and lend me his trousers, and put on a pair of mine. It's the only way."

It was an informal favor to ask of your dinner guest. But I sprinted. Obediently, with whoops that shook the rafters, Billy tore upstairs to the

rescue. Billy is four inches taller than Jim, and about five inches larger around. The effect——

"Yes, I know I look like the Old Homestead. But never mind. Where's my car? Where's Peter Grimm?" stormed Jim, dashing down the portico. "Where's Peter Grimm, I say? Doesn't the mutt know that I want him to drive me to town?"

Whereat Anina waddled shrilly from the dining-room.

"Manuel knew not that you desired his presence, Señor. He has gone to a wake. To the wake of his friend, Esteban. He will not return till midnight."

"A wake? Peter Grimm?" Jim grabbed the wheel. He turned a face of fury. "I'll bet you my last cent that *he wore my trousers!*"

The car whirled away down Tlalpam Road. Anina applied a corner of her rebozo to a perfectly dry eye. Billy Foster and I looked at each other.

"Once more, Peter Grimm gets fired. For all eternity," said Billy, cheerfully.

Too true. A wake, in Mexico, is a social affair which demands one's best garments, and better than one's best. You can't wonder at Peter. Beholding the festal turkey, he had reasoned, in his simple Aztec way, that the Señor would dine at home. This one evening, the ceremonial raiment would not be missed. To-morrow, sadly but firmly, we will exile Peter forever from our doors. Day after to-

morrow, at the latest, we will take the car, and go to the village, and bring a tearful and repentant Peter home to our hearts once more.

P. S.—Dinner is over, long since. The Campbells have gone upstairs. I'm sitting in the sala, with a book, ostensibly chaperoning Miss Eleanora and Billy, who are strolling up and down the dusky patio. It's moonlight, a great soft amber Mexican moon. A little breeze blows fitfully across the heliotrope hedge; the palm leaves clash softly, like water dropping in a fountain-pool. In the mingled gleam and shadow, Miss Eleanora looks more the goddess than ever, mystical, serene. Her low voice answers Billy's, clear, remote. Billy is telling her of the time he entertained the governor of Chihuahua, a mighty man in more ways than one, at a grand dinner, and the floor of his rickety sala gave way in the midst of the function. His laugh rings out like a boy's, spontaneous, bubbling over. Apparently that moonlight holds no enchantment for Billy. He has laughed and joked all evening, like the overgrown youngster he is. Just the same, that mean little anxious twinge assails me once again. Take it from me, I've been twenty-two myself. I don't trust that moon.

CASA EMBURY.
February twenty-fourth. 1916.

DEAR MOLLY:

Queer uneasy rumors float about nowadays. Rather worrying rumors, too. There is talk of another uprising, under a new leader, in the south. There are constant reports of wrangles along the border, where Villa and his merry men are making one more last grand-stand play. And always before us are the sorrows of our poor harassed people. We give, and give, and groan over their miseries —and then go home, and call in our friends, and give a dinner-party, to screw up our courage again. That's the real reason why we Colony folks wear our best clothes, and give teas, and dance, and frivol. We must keep up the game. Or else go all to pieces.

These feverish days, all Mexico drifts in and out of our gates. If you could spend a morning in my patio, you'd see the very innards of Mexico unpacked before your eyes. My first caller this morning was Padre Ignatius, from over Cordoba way. The engaging old gossip rode in before we'd finished breakfast, and sat a long hour in the patio, telling stories, while his mouse-gray mule was fed. Incidentally, he alluded to a call last week, from a remorseful bandit, who yearned to do penance for certain evil deeds. "I set him to cleaning my cistern, then had him sweep the chimneys, and he did both very well." While he chuckled, a poor little peon crept humbly to the gates, and begged admit-

tance. Before daybreak, he had loaded his four burros with vegetables, and had set out for Tacubaya market. He started too early, poor little worm. At sunrise, he met three scalawags who seized his burros, beat him cruelly, and left him in the ditch. I could have cried over him, poor bruised patient creature. We fed him up (I wish you could have seen Anina coo over him, and feed him canned peaches, right out of the can!), and Miss Eleanora insisted on giving him money, and we sent him on his way, assured and comforted.

He wasn't out of sight before there came an excited young mozo, bringing the big costly touring-car of Señor Guerrero, our twelve-miles-distant neighbor. "The Señor sends his car, Señora, and requests that you will protect it for him, in your own garage. For that he hears threats, by night and by day, that it will be seized for the Army."

I lifted the rug, and looked dubiously into the tonneau. It was packed solid; cases of silver, tin despatch boxes, a small steamer trunk, heavy with papers and valuables. This is the sixth auto that our Mexican friends have sent us in the past three months. Jim and I are expected to spread our mantle of gringo immunity over all of them. Further, our east wing already overflows with barrels and boxes of household goods, left in our care by Colony folk who scuttled back to the States a year ago. Growling like a missionary at an unwelcome donation box, I took the new car in.

A few minutes later, a spruce young Carranzista officer rode up with his squad, and asked permission to make a domiciliary visit. "We search a deserter, Señora." I watched them beat the shrubbery, shivering to my bones for fear they might find him, but they rode away, disappointed. As they galloped away, a big glittering car rolled in; the sumptuous gray limousine of Señor Mendoza.

Now, Señor Mendoza is a wealthy hacendado of a not infrequent type. You folk in the States never seem to realize that such a type exists. He is a Mexican to his finger-tips; an Oxford graduate, middle-aged, courtly, eminent in his profession, a citizen of the world, in every finer sense. With him came the Señora Mendoza, and his aged mother, "the sovereign Señora," as we call her. They had driven out from the City to pay their ceremonial yearly call. The Señora, dark, stout, gentle, French from motor-bonnet to shoe, was distinctly overshadowed by her mother-in-law. No wonder. "The sovereign Señora" is eighty-six years old. In her you see the last dim shadow of Maximilian's flaunting court; for, fifty years ago, she was lady-in-waiting to poor lovely Carlotta. To-day, she is a little brown shrivelled walnut, in a gown just a trifle more French than the Señora's. The emeralds on her skinny old throat are quite a bit finer than those her daughter wears. Her manner is even more poised, more gracious, if such a thing could be. Two men in livery carried her

from the car to my sala, as reverently as if she were a sacred image. That long hour, she sat in our one carved chair of state, speaking almost nothing, but dominating us like a little wizened empress. Under her gray veils, her narrow eyes perused us. Now and then they glinted, as with cold flame. It gave me a queer weird discomfort, to feel that glance; a sense of being weighed, judged, set aside: those eyes were so terribly old, so terribly wise.

Just as my callers were making their punctilious adieux, up rattled Billy Foster's milk-cart. Out jumped Billy and Miss Eleanora. My three babies tumbled uproariously from the back. They'd been jingling around Billy's milk-route, as usual. Billy had a yellow crocus stuck over one ear. He looked like the young Antinous, and he came laughing up the patio as if the world belonged to him. Miss Eleanora swung into step beside him. Her hair was wound around her head in a rope that glittered in the sunlight like raw gold. Never, in all my days, have I looked on anything so beautiful.

My three guests looked at her. Señor Mendoza stopped dead in his tracks. The Señora's dark face glowed with amazed delight. But I looked at the old, old woman.

Beneath her wrinkled lids, her eyes narrowed to two points of light. She peered into Billy's laughing face. She stared a long minute at Miss Eleanora's golden splendor. Then into her old sardonic face came a look of such wonder and pity as would

wring your heart. Wonder at their young insolent glory; pity—the tender, unfathomable pity of old age for youth.

Then, under her breath, she said one word:

"Bendito!"

And I saw her little claw-fingers make a swift gesture: the world-old sign of blessing, old when the conquistadors were young.

I watched my guests drive away. Somehow, I was a little breathless. I wanted to get away, and think that last minute over. With an inhospitable eye, I saw the gates swing open once again. This time, it was Colonel Atterbury, our self-made hero. He who once slew thirty Moros at one fell swoop. He had come to return the garments borrowed of Jim, some nights ago. He floundered out of his hired car, and spread himself lavishly over a patio chair.

"I met the Mendoza gang as I drove in. Dare-say they've been calling here? Ya-as, I know, the Señor puts on a rather good front. But it's all front, don't you know. Under that veneer, he's a greaser, like the rest of 'em. Pack of savages, every last one of these Mexicans, mind that. What's the use of our trying to civilize a people like them, anyhow?"

"What, indeed?" murmured I.

BILLY FOSTER AND THE SNOW QUEEN

CASA EMBURY.
March sixteenth. 1916.

DEAR MOLLY:

Don't sit up nights worrying over us because of the Villa expedition. The Columbus raid caused some excitement, but the city is fairly quiet. However, martial law is more strictly enforced than ever; and that queer furtive tension of dread rises higher and higher, every day.

This morning, Jim put his lordly foot down on my driving into the city. He'll have to take it up again. A mozo has just ridden out in wild haste, bringing a note from our delightful friends, the Cobb O'Sullivans. They bid us come into town this morning, without fail, and attend upon the christening of their wee new son. The Cobb O'Sullivans are, as you may surmise, Irish. Nobody but an O'Sullivan of Roscommon would take his precious new baby into a city hammer-locked and beleaguered like ours. They're an adorable family. Red-headed Cobb, velvet-eyed Mona, seven ducky stair-step children.

"But I've helped christen all the other seven, Jim. I can't miss this christening. I shall drive in to the Cathedral, even if I meet a brand-new revolution on the way."

"Hope you don't meet anything worse than a revolution!" scolded Jim. But drive in we did, Mrs. Campbell and Miss Eleanora and I, all in our Sunday best, with Antonio at the wheel, and Ciro beside

him, a loaded revolver gripped in his slim steady hand. It proved a monotonous ride. We were challenged only twice, and were let pass with a civil question or so.

Again the city lay benumbed and silent. The houses were closed and shuttered. Troops of armed men, in ragged uniform, lounged through the streets, and hailed our motor with insolent calls and laughter. We had almost reached the Cathedral when, directly ahead, we saw a familiar sight: Billy Foster's yellow milk-cart. Billy was making his rounds, as usual. He was the first civilian we had met on those deserted streets. Honestly, I don't believe that boy has gumption enough to be afraid.

He waved to us, gaily, and we commanded that he climb out of his wagon, and go with us to the christening. While we urged, the O'Sullivans drove up in their sway-backed old victoria, and fell on him fondly, and hauled him bodily into the Cathedral.

It was like taking sanctuary, to step inside the Sagrario doors, and find ourselves in that cool domed gloom. Rank on rank, the candle-flames on the altar lifted in slender spires, unwavering in that windless air. A whiff of incense floated through the dusk. We waited near the font, till the Bishop, very sumptuous in gold-encrusted lace and purple, should come down to us. I stood and held a wriggling string of O'Sullivans in leash. There was the usual splutteration while we rounded up Robert

Emmett, who had crawled behind a screen in pursuit of a black beetle, and choked off Sheila and Dominick, who had started a brisk fight over an emaciated gumdrop. ("She's had three sucks, and me only one!") But all the clamor was hushed when the Bishop lifted up little silky-headed Patrick, and splashed the consecrated water over his small drowsy rose of a face. And ringing through that hush came the ancient splendid words.

The wrigglers clung to me, wide-eyed, quiet. Mona's pale lips smiled in weary mother-triumph. But Cobb O'Sullivan's broad florid face grew suddenly grave. He put out his arms for his little son, then looked down at that tiny soft face, a moment daunted and wondering. Wondering, maybe, whether in this world of battering arms and cruelty, even that ancient powerful invocation could shield a little silky-headed boy. But when we went out of the Cathedral, the sunshine lay warm on the great square, and the pigeons whirred and cooed, and the dirty soldiers lounging in the Zocalo smiled and waved their ragged caps to the baby, as if they knew here went a little new knight, riding out, accolade on shoulder, away on his long, long quest.

I glanced at Miss Eleanora, then at Billy Foster. I love to see the swift appreciation kindle in their observant young eyes. But Miss Eleanora and Billy had no thought for the great sunny Park, nor the pigeons, nor the little new knight beside them. Not they. Instead, they were looking at each other.

Miss Eleanora's face was inscrutable, a beautiful calm mask. But Billy—Oh, poor Billy! Poor honest man-body, who could not even try to hide the great love in his heart! That love flamed in his black eyes, it glowed from every line of his young bold wistful face. And the sight of it stabbed my own guilty heart, through and through.

I knew better than to throw those two together. If I'm ever forgiven for this! Though how I can ever forgive myself——

Well, this is a changeful life! We returned from the O'Sullivan christening, late in the afternoon. Jim and Mr. Campbell had gone into town, leaving us three women-folk to dine in lonesome state. It was just twilight, and Mercedes was hooking me into my frock when Rosita, my seamstress, came to the door. Two strange vaqueros were at the gates. They demanded to see the Señora Campbell. Antonio had ordered them away, but they refused to go. Their errand was important, they declared. They must not be sent away.

"Very well. I'll go to the gates myself."

I tucked my little automatic under my Liberty scarf, and went down through the dim court-yard. Miss Eleanora Huntingdon, lovely in misty white, swept imperially at my side.

"If they are bandits, I want to see them at close range. It will be most interesting," she declared.

At that, Mrs. Campbell, cackling like an alarmed hen, girded up her satin skirts, and went, too.

The bandits awaited us beyond the barred gates. They didn't look so formidable; two boys, sixteen and nineteen, perhaps, gaunt, dirty, dog-tired, sitting patiently on their fagged little mounts. At sight of us, they leaped to the ground and saluted. Mrs. Campbell gave a startled cry.

"Why, it's Luis, our head vaquero! And Mateo! Boys! I thought you had run away with the brigands! The day they looted us!"

"The Señora speaks rightly." Luis, the elder boy, bowed with dignity. A queer gleam lit in his haggard sweat-stained face. "We ran away with the brigands, but we did not run far. Now we have returned. And we bring to the Señora that which we have taken away. If the Señora permits the gate to be opened——"

I flew to unbolt the gate. The boys stepped inside. Both carried bundles. Luis held a square flat object wrapped in a dirty serape. Mateo held a heavy roll of grimed linen.

"If we may carry these treasures to the casa," began Luis. But Mrs. Campbell had snatched the flat parcel from his hands. She tore off the scarlet cloth. She screamed aloud.

"Grandfather McCracken! The Smibert portrait! Oh, Luis! Luis! You saved it for us!"

"And here behold the other treasures of the Señora." Mateo laughed out, in sheer delight.

He dumped the bundle of linen on a bench. Out rolled a mass of beautiful silver. Spoons, cups, a nest of exquisite trays, eight antique candlesticks.

Mrs. Campbell didn't cry out again. Instead, she caught up that silver, and burst into tears of joy.

"My wedding gifts! And Mother Campbell's spoons, and my own mother's candlesticks! Oh, Luis! Oh, Mateo! How could you do this? How could you save these things from the brigands?"

"By pretense, Señora, that we had forsaken you and the Señor, and had joined ourselves to their band," Luis explained, with dignity. But under the dignity, he fairly glowed. His eyes clung to his Señora's face. "You will remember that, when the mob swooped down, we vaqueros have turned from the Señor's commands, and have rushed through the hacienda, seizing with both hands. That was my ruse, Señora. And it succeeded. The mob believed that we were joined with them, to loot. Loot, we did. But all that we could carry away we have claimed as our share. And we have hid it all for you."

"Hidden it?"

"You recall, Señora, the dry valley, twenty miles east of the hacienda? There, in a thicket, you will find your rugs, and the great bowls of silver from the sala, and the metal box that holds your documents of value. Also, in that valley, hid deep in the brush, we have forty cows. When the bandits

drove away the herd, we claimed these forty, and they were granted us. But all these weeks, we have been forced to stay near the bandits' camp, across the mountains, for that the Carranzistas have held the roads between. Three days ago, we had word that the Carranzistas have marched away to the south, to check another insurrection. Then, at last, we have dared bring the cattle down the mountain. They are of the blooded stock, Señora. The Señor will be glad to possess them again."

"Glad!" Mrs. Campbell couldn't speak. She sat in the twilight, hugging Grandfather McCracken's bland painted counterfeit. Her ample lap overflowed with the beloved silver. Her round face was fairly illumined. "Glad to get those cows back! Luis! If you and Mateo *knew!* And to risk your lives, bringing this silver down through the mountains! And—Mateo, your arm! I'll wager you haven't dressed that cut since the day of the raid!"

Humbly Mateo admitted that such was the case. Fondly scolding, Mrs. Campbell brought clean linen and boric, and set to work. I set to work, too. So did Anina, and the maids. We put the best food in our larder upon the table, and served the boys ourselves, to their manifest chagrin. None the less, they ate like famished creatures. Suddenly I bethought myself.

"Luis, there were eight of you boys. Where are the other six?"

Two were staying at the bandit camp, to avert

suspicion, Luis explained. Another, slightly wounded, had ridden across-country, to his kinsfolk. Three were guarding the cattle, in the dry valley. Luis and Mateo were to rejoin them there.

"Five of you. What provisions have you?"

Luis stammered, reddened under his dark skin. Quite sufficient, Señora, he answered, briefly. But Mateo looked up with a child's eagerness, and that hungry glance gave it all away. I plunged into my storeroom, and unlocked right and left.

"Bring those two largest paniers, Rosita. Mrs. Campbell, help me pack. Beans and bacon and coffee—Anina, you empty all the lump sugar into a sack, and put it in. Crowd in oranges wherever there is room, and the bricks of chocolate that the Señora Estrada gave us. Bring the cigars from the Señor's humidor, and the boxes of cigarettes from the guest-rooms."

"And please get more chocolate, when that is gone. Accept, I beg you, amigo mio." With the sweetest grace in the world, Miss Eleanora laid one white hand on Luis' own. I caught the clink of gold. "And this for more cigarettes." Into Mateo's hand flashed another coin.

"Gracias, Señorita," stammered both boys. Mateo looked almost frightened. But Luis looked after her as she drifted away, then turned to me. Luis is scant nineteen. I dare say he has had no more bringing-up than a chipmunk. Very like, he cannot write his name. Yet——

"It is very strange, Señora. I do not understand. You, and this Señorita, and the Señor Campbell, and many, many others, Americans, are most just and kind. You are as our own people, as our fathers and our mothers. Yet in the City, and at the ranches, and the mines, are other Americans, who are harsh and treacherous. They snatch our lands, they affront our women, they see us as the dust beneath their feet. Amigos—to them? We are as dogs. Why is this so, Señora? Why?"

"I don't know, Luis," said I. I couldn't look at the boy. Shame burnt my very flesh. "I certainly don't know why."

Well, we packed those paniers to bursting. We went to the gates with the boys, and bade them Adios, as guests of high degree. Then we sat down to our dinner, what there was left of it. At nine, the men came home. You should have seen the commotion! It was droll, and pitiful, too, to see stout, middle-aged Mrs. Campbell cling to her husband, and go all to sobbing laughing bits, trying to tell the news. "Grandfather McCracken, safe and sound, except his nose scraped, the least bit! And all my teaspoons! And forty cows! And, oh, Sandy, the boys didn't turn traitor! They were doing their best, the very best they knew!"

That was all Mr. Campbell seemed to grasp. And all he seemed to care for. He stood patting his wife's plump shoulders, and saying over and over, like a man in a daze: "So the kids didn't go

back on me. They didn't go back on me!" Then his face fairly blazed. his gray head went up with a jerk. "What do we care for the truck they saved, Lida? As long as the kids stayed square?"

An hour later, as we were going to bed, Jim suddenly turned to me. It takes Jim to put a situation into words.

"Say, Bess, can you beat it? Isn't that Mexico, all over? Poor little houn' dog country, booted by all the big powerful nations all over the map! You'd think the decency would be knocked out of these people, long ago. And yet the fearlessness of them, the patience, the tireless loyalty! Why do they keep on doing the square thing, when half of us foreigners exploit them, right and left? Just tell me the answer."

"I can't," said I. "Any more than I could answer Luis, an hour ago."

One week since my last letter. We haven't laid eyes on Billy Foster in that time. Not since the day of the christening. He doesn't even deliver our milk, any more. He sends it by a vaquero. We miss him abominably. Those daily visits of Billy's were like daily bursts of sunshine. Emily Ann asks, every morning, "Won't my Billy tum to-day?" Jim Junior loudly grieves because Billy used to let him drive the milk-wagon, and the vaquero won't. Miss Eleanora never mentions him. She has been unusually busy of late. A shipment of long-delayed mail

came yesterday. Half the bag must have been for her — sixty-odd letters, she remarked. Doubtless thirty of the sixty were from her worthy Englishman, and the other thirty from her illustrious officer. Furthermore——

"I shall start back to Boston next Tuesday," she remarked, at luncheon. "Grandfather Huntingdon has grown quite irritable about my staying here so long. I shall leave a trained nurse in charge of my hospital."

"Will you ever come back, Eleanora?" The question said itself.

Miss Eleanora considered. The faintest color rose in her cheek.

"I certainly intend to. Although it may take some time to pacify Grandfather. I should like to stay here indefinitely. I find Mexico and its problems most interesting."

Truly, I don't believe my Snow Queen has one particle of feeling. I don't believe she has a heart. She's not a woman, anyhow. She is a goddess, a beautiful, aloof, indifferent thing, as scornful of all our piffling joys and sorrows as if she dwelt on high Olympus, in flesh as she does in spirit.

And when I think of Billy Foster! My brave silent Billy, fighting with all his might to keep his rickety ship afloat! Billy, who loves that marble creature with all his soul, yet will never dare to speak!

I wish Miss Eleanora had married her Honor-

able Augustus, and sailed away to England, before she'd ever heard of Mexico. And I wish Billy Foster was in West New Guinea. Milk-wagon, wistful eyes, broken heart, and all.

CASA EMBURY.
April fifth. 1916.

MOLLY,

I am writing to you to-night, because I dare not be idle one moment. I've got to keep a grip on myself, somehow. Though the heart is all but torn out of me, with anger and dread and hideous torturing fear.

Yesterday noon, came a repentant message from Peter Grimm. As usual, Jim and I set off to bring the prodigal home. We asked Miss Eleanora to go along, but she had just finished washing that golden hair of hers, so she declined. As we drove away, she was sitting on the house-top, drying the great glittering honey-colored mass. She had on a white dressing-gown of heavy silk, which clung to her in shining folds and made her look taller and more royal than ever. She waved good-bye to us, and it was like being waved away by Kriemhild from her tower.

"Sometimes that creature's splendor fairly daunts me," said I, looking back at her. "Other times, I want to take her on my lap and cuddle her. She seems as literally a child as our own Emily Ann."

"I wonder how she seems to Billy Foster, nowadays," observed Jim.

"Don't you dare talk to me about Billy Foster!" I flared. I was as glum as an owl the rest of the way.

Tell me, how do we know, always, the oncoming of calamity? How do we feel that terror, even before the blow strikes down? Halfway back, a strange unreasoning panic seized me. Jim felt it, too, although he laughed at me. Ciro felt it. He sent the car whizzing down the home road like a mad thing. At the gates, Antonio met us. One look at his face, and I leaped from the car.

"Antonio! Tell me. The children—"

"No, Señora, no!" Antonio's hands twisted, his dark face twitched. "Not the children. But Señor Foster—and the Señorita Huntingdon——"

I fled past him to the patio. Sprawled in my hammock, his head and arm swathed in bandages, lay Carlos, Billy Foster's favorite vaquero. The village doctor was working over him, with Anina and Rosita to aid. The story came out piecemeal.

Jim and I had not been gone ten minutes when Carlos galloped up, clinging, half-conscious, to his horse. Miss Eleanora and the maids had rushed down to meet him. He was almost collapsed, but he managed to tell his news.

"The Señor! Go, save him! The raiders are looting his hacienda. They have wounded him, they have set his house on fire. Go!"

Then he had toppled off his horse. Miss Eleanora

had caught him as he fell. Half a minute more, and she had tied on a first-aid bandage, telephoned for the doctor, sprung upon the vaquero's horse, and galloped away towards Billy Foster's ranch.

"So Billy is trapped by raiders. And Miss Eleanora has ridden straight into that trap."

"Yep. Now it's up to us to get 'em both out." Jim made a dash for the telephone. Twenty minutes more, and he had collected a posse from Tlalpam, and was rushing off down the road.

The maids and I flew about and made everything ready; beds, old linen, hot water, restoratives. We were still hurrying about when two more of Billy's vaqueros rode in, both with gunshot wounds, and half mad with fright. Their reports tallied as to the raid. The mob, a hundred or more, had galloped down on the hacienda at noon, shouting and firing. They surrounded the place, drove off the cattle, stripped the barn and storehouses of grain and supplies, and set the house afire. But as to Billy himself, their accounts vary. One insists that Billy must be burned to death in the hacienda. "We know he was still within, Señora, for he fired from the windows upon the mob, even when the walls were blazing round him. And the house burnt all in a flash, like a heap of dry leaves." But the other boy is delirious from pain and terror. He screams out, over and over: "But the Señor is saved! I tell you, he is saved! Even as we rode away, I looked back and saw him carried from

that burning house. Carried by an angel, Señora! An angel! I myself have beheld that miracle, with my own eyes. Tall, and all white, and very stern, and on her head a great gold crown!" Poor boy, he's completely out of his wits.

We put them both to bed, and the doctor did all that he could. They seem to be resting fairly well. Now the maids and I are sitting waiting for news. We have waited three interminable hours. We'll probably wait all night.

If anything happens to Eleanora, my beautiful reckless girl, it will break my heart. And the Hosmers and the Huntingdons will never forgive me. But if anything has happened to Billy, my darling Billy——

April sixth.—

I shall finish this letter now, and send it North in the State Department bag. I have been up all night, and I ache in every bone. But I must put this down in black and white. Or die trying.

Jim and his posse rode straight to Billy's ranch. They found only desolation. The corrals were stripped, the house was a heap of burning timbers. There was no trace of Billy, nor of the mob. Nor of Miss Eleanora. They scoured the roads roundabout, they searched thickets and gullies, they entered every house between here and Tacubaya. They hunted till daybreak, then came home, snatched a hasty meal, and started off again. Jim ques-

tioned Billy's vaqueros closely, but learned no more than they had already told. The elder boy declared that Billy had met death in his burning house. The younger boy, now hot with fever, could only repeat his senseless cry.

"Carried off by an angel, Señora! Believe my word. That have I seen, with my own eyes!"

"Billy is lying dead, under those charred timbers," I choked. Jim didn't try to contradict me. "And Eleanora——"

"Eleanora has been snatched away by those fiends. Which is worse yet," said Jim, under his breath. "Come along, fellows, let's get busy."

I watched them whirl away. It was past sunrise, now. The sky was as blue as a turquoise bowl. A warm wind stirred the honeysuckle. The sweet mocking day infuriated me. I tramped up and down the patio, and raged, and prayed, alternately. Finally I took the field-glasses, and started for the roof. But halfway upstairs, Anina's scream tore up to me.

"Señora! Señora! Look! To the east, see! A yellow wagon comes. A woman walks, and leads the horse. Señora! It is the milk-cart! The milk-cart of Señor Foster! And the Señorita Eleanora walks beside!"

I didn't run down those stairs. I fell down. Away through the court I flew, down to the gates.

Up the road plodded Billy Foster's yellow wagon, drawn by a stumbling exhausted horse. At the

horse's head plodded a wan white-faced girl. Her white dress was torn and stained with blood, her arms were bare to the shoulder, her yellow hair hung in a great tangled web. Eleanora Huntingdon.

Anina and I reached the gate, just as she staggered in. Something in her white face silenced the wild questions on our lips.

She led the horse to the patio. She lifted the flapping canvas wagon-top. Prone on the floor of the wagon, his boyish face ash-white, his big splendid body a lax heap, lay Billy Foster.

"I don't know whether he's alive or not," said Miss Eleanora, slowly. Her voice shook with fatigue. Her lips were as gray as Billy Foster's own. "He's breathing yet, I think. Tell the maids to bring a mattress. His left arm is broken. And he has two gunshot wounds, and his head is hurt. I don't know how badly. Rosita, can you help me lift? Please don't howl so, Anina. All together—steady, now!"

Between us, we carried that limp shattered thing across the patio, and into the sala, and laid him on a couch. Then we stood staring at each other, dulled and sick.

"One of you call the American doctor."

I ran to the telephone. The doctor was not to be found. I wasted ten precious minutes in finding a physician. When I finally located one, it was only to realize that he could not reach our casa in less

than an hour. He would be challenged and held up by sentries, over and over.

"An hour?" Miss Eleanora's pale lips set. "Then we'll take care of him ourselves. The best that we can."

White-cheeked, unflinching, steady as a field-surgeon, she took command. Quaking, desperately obedient, Anina and Rosita and I followed her quiet orders. We washed off the blood and grime, we bandaged his wounds. With my shaky assistance, Miss Eleanora even dared to strap up the terrible slash across his forehead. One mortal hour we worked over him, holding our breath for fear that he might never wake again.

Just at the end of that dreadful hour, Billy stirred, drew a deep, hard breath. The ash-gray pallor dulled in his cheeks. Slowly, slowly, a faint hue of returning life came into his ghastly face. Presently he stirred. Again he drew that long slow waking breath. Heaven be praised, you can't kill the Billy Fosters of this world with anything short of a machine gun.

Rosita clutched her rosary, dropped to her knees, and began to sob for pure thankfulness. Anina retired to the corridor, bawling vociferously. I wanted to get away and bawl myself. Louder than Anina, if possible. But my devouring curiosity was stronger than my tears.

"Eleanora! Tell me. Where did you find him? How did you bring him here? Tell me about it. Every word!"

"There is not very much to tell." Eleanora leaned over him, steady-eyed, intent. Fingers laid lightly on his wrist, she listened to his breathing: her drawn face relaxed. "He is coming out very well. I hardly dared hope that he could rally. After—after——"

"After—what?"

She hardly seemed to hear me.

"It was all like a bad dream," she said, very slowly. She was as calm as always, her cool serenity not one whit stirred. Yet a deep light shone in her eyes. A strange new note pulsed in her beautiful unshaken voice. "I was up on the roof, drying my hair, you know, when Billy's vaquero came tearing up. I ran downstairs, and helped him out of his saddle. He had an ugly stab-wound, and he fainted before we could get him into the house, but he managed to tell it all. 'Bandits! The Señor! Alone!'

"I told Anina what to do for him, then I jumped on his horse, and struck out. I rather fancy that vaquero's horse was new to skirts. Anyway, he bucked considerably, and it took me some time to reach Billy's ranch. When I did get there, the riot was in full swing. There must have been a hundred men in that mob. Some were driving off cattle, but most of them were closing in around the house, shouting and firing, in a great mounted ring. Every minute or so, there'd be a spit of flame from a front window. So I knew Billy was still alive and in action. But at the back of the house, three men were already setting fire to the walls. I knew that rickety old

shack would go like tinder. So I didn't wait to plan much. I just drove my horse at a gallop, right through that ring."

"You rode through the mob? Right up to the house—straight through the firing?"

"Well, nothing hit me. The fact is, the minute I broke through their lines, the mob stopped shooting. It was rather odd. An instant before, they'd been firing a regular fusillade. But as I thrust through the ring, and sprang off my horse at the door, the uproar stopped like magic. I didn't stop to ask why. I ran into the house. Billy had seen me coming, and had unbolted the door. He was crouched in a heap, bleeding terribly from the two bullets in his shoulder, and he was pretty nearly gone. But I managed to pull him to his feet. Then I dragged him outside, hoisted him on the horse, and scrambled on myself. I fully expected that the horse would buck at that, but he stood like a lamb. Billy lay limp, half in the saddle, half on the horse's neck. He hadn't sense enough to hold to me, and I knew it would take both my arms and all my strength to keep him from spilling off. So I just let go the bridle, and gave the horse its head. We crossed the clear space on the keen jump. We went through that ring of men as if it had been a ring of smoke. Nobody even shouted Halt. Not one shot was fired. It—it was almost uncanny."

We looked at each other. There fell a curious silence. Yes. It was uncanny.

"I dare say the mob was too shocked for utterance, at sight of an American señorita with her hair down." Her lips bent in a droll little smile. "It was a perfect mop, just as it is now." She pushed back the great gold fleece that hung to her knee. "Flying in every direction, too, for it was so fluffy from the washing. And then this ridiculous white dressing-gown! No wonder they stopped firing, to gape at such an object! But what I cannot understand, is, why they did not fire after us. Nor pursue us. But they did not make the slightest move. We galloped away, unmolested. I glanced back once. They were sitting their horses and staring after us. You'd think they were men cast under a spell. Hypnotized. Really."

I leaned back, a bit dizzily. Again I saw the face of Billy's wounded vaquero. Again I heard his frantic stubborn cry.

"Carried from his burning house by an angel, Señora! I myself have beheld, with my own eyes!"

"It appears to me," said I to myself, "that Rubio wasn't so delirious, after all."

Miss Eleanora stooped over Billy again. Her fingers hovered on his wrist: her breath came rather quick. She bent to him with a queer tigress crouch, wary, intent. Billy heaved a profound, contented sigh, and settled deeper into his pillow. Miss Eleanora relaxed a shade.

"I know he is doing well. But I am still a bit fidgety. Well, to go on with my story. The horse

dashed off with us at his own sweet will. I dared not try to pull him in, for fear he'd buck, and throw us both. I hadn't a very good seat, and Billy was quite as floppy as a sack of meal. Finally the horse turned from the road, across some untilled land for a mile or so, then down a hill into a little gully. There were stunted trees all around, and not a house in sight. It wasn't a bad hiding-place. I slid off the horse, and lifted Billy down, and laid him as flat as I could, and tore my sleeves and my petticoat into strips and tied up the gunshot wounds as best I could. He was unconscious, of course, and he had lost so much blood that I didn't dare hope. But he kept on breathing. That was a good deal.

"I waited there till sundown. As soon as it was fairly dusk, I climbed on the horse, and went back. The mob had gone. Everything else was gone, too. Cattle, horses, farm-tools, grain—all swept out. The house was a heap of smouldering coals. It made me rather sick. But I didn't stop to look around. I went to the wagon-shed. Evidently they'd forgotten to fire that. I knew what I wanted. The milk cart. I got between the shafts, and hauled it out. I managed to hitch the horse to it, with bits of rope. The mob had carried off all the harness, of course. That horse has been hitched to a breaking-cart, but I fancy he has never drawn a wagon, for he made a most annoying fuss. But at last I got him quieted down. I didn't dare try to drive him. For that matter, I couldn't, not having any reins. So I walked,

leading him, back to the gully where I had left Billy. It took quite a little while."

She paused, and looked down at her hands. I looked, too. They weren't pearl-and-roseleaf any longer. They were scratched, bruised, amazingly grimy. Every delicate nail was broken and torn.

"It was rather a tug, to get the milk-cart out of the shed," she remarked. "And quite a little work, to harness that fractious horse. But I managed, well enough. It was about ten o'clock when I reached Billy. He was still unconscious, and moaning, but his pulse had steadied up, and he wasn't quite so limp when I picked him up."

"When you picked him up——"

"I had to get him into the wagon, you know. And it was very dark in the gully—most inconvenient! Then we started back. Luckily, I had some idea of the way we had come. I walked as fast as I could. I hoped somebody would come by and give us a lift, but we did not meet a single soul. There was no moon, but there was starlight. That helped. Twice the wagon stuck in a mudhole, and I had to hunt sticks, and pry it out. That took time."

"Do you realize how far you have walked, Eleanora?"

"Oh, twelve miles, maybe. Fifteen, perhaps. Not more than that. The gully where I left Billy was not more than four miles east of his hacienda."

Four miles east: and Billy's hacienda is eight miles east of our own. Twelve miles at a stretch: to say

nothing of the four miles she had tramped, coaxing a reluctant horse, from Billy's ranch back to the gully where he lay.

"You needn't look so amazed, Mrs. Embury. It wasn't such a difficult matter. Anyway, I had it to do. It *was* rather hard, getting Billy into the wagon, for the horse didn't want to stand, and I had to tie his head to a sapling with the sash of my dressing-gown. But I hoisted Billy in at last. Then we came home. And that's all."

Again Billy's head turned on the pillow. Very slowly Billy's dark eyes opened. Very steadily he looked up at the beautiful intent face, bent so close above his own. There was no awe left in Billy's eyes, now. Nor any pain. Nor even the shadow of longing. They held only the drowsy satisfaction of an utterly happy, tired child.

"Then you and your milkman came home," said Billy. He groped out, weakly. It appeared that Miss Eleanora knew what he wanted. She caught his big wabbling paw in both lovely dirty palms. She laid it against her soft cheek, cradled it close.

I got up, and started away. I felt fairly sure they wouldn't miss me. But I caught Billy's happy incredulous voice.

"Why did you come for me, Eleanora? You haven't told me that. Tell me now."

Miss Eleanora considered. A faint pink flushed her round cheek. Then she spoke out. Spoke out

like the goddess she is, tranquil, shameless, royally serene.

"Because I've wanted you for my own, Billy Foster, since the first day I laid eyes on you. The morning of the dog-fight. Do you remember?"

"Do I remember?"

"And I have tried to make it clear to you, in every way I knew. I've asked you to this house, times without number. I've played tennis with you, and walked and talked with you, and ridden your rounds with you in your bumpy old milk-wagon. I've simply thrown myself at your head, day after day. But you—you wouldn't understand. You wouldn't look at me. Nor listen. You mooned about, and moped your ridiculous heart out. Because you thought I was such a silly blind fool, I couldn't look past your poverty and your ill-luck, and see how splendid you really are. Because you thought I was such a stuck-up simpleton, I'd not want to marry you, a milkman. When I'd drive your milk-cart, I'd chase the cows for you, if you wanted me to!"

There was an inarticulate sound from Billy. Inarticulate, probably, because her hand was against his lips.

"To-day was my last chance to tell you. For I am going away. I made up my mind to tell you, if I had to get a megaphone. But when word came that you were trapped in your house, with a hundred maddened bandits surrounding you, I knew that was

my chance. I had you cornered, Billy. You couldn't get away."

Then I did go, at last. But at the door, I looked back. Billy lay with his eyes on her face. His own shone like a child's in its unquestioning content. Miss Eleanora stood looking down at him. Her fair hair glittered in the sunlight. She stood there, glorious as ever, my Snow Queen. But the curve of the cheek turned to me was the curve of my Emily Ann's baby cheek, asleep upstairs in her crib.

"They're just two children, after all," thought I. I tried to smile at them, very cool and superior, as befitted my age and experience. But I saw them through a mist. And to my lips came just one word: the word that a little shrivelled old woman had spoken over them, weeks ago. And my heart was beating out that word to them, with all the love it could hold: "*Bendito! Bendito!*"

MILLICENT: MAKER OF HISTORY

History repeats itself, so say the wise folk. True. Sometimes history not only repeats itself, but improves on itself. For example:

High on a dusty shelf, in a certain dusty college library, you will find an ancient little cowhide book: "Bradford's Journall of Plymouth Colony." Brief, unvarnished records of fearless Puritan men and women stand for all time upon those crumbling leaves. Consider one terse narrative.

"On Monday, June the 3, 1638, a Band of Redskins surpris'd the farm of John Parkins, on Naumkeag River. Millicent, wife of John, a woman of much comeliness, was placing bread in her Dutch oven, & saw a Savage creeping towards the Stockade, & rang the great Bell for Alarum. John Parkins & his two bound boys ran lustily from the field & reached the Stockade alive but wounded by arrows. Millicent held off the Indeans with Blunderbuss whilst the three dragged them inside the Stockade. The Indeans strove mightily to reach the Stockade, but Millicent fir'd with such good aim that not one Red Devil liv'd to pass it. John & his boys, though weak from blood-letting, took turns loading & firing.

"At night, the Attack rode away, leaving 12 dead & 3 wounded. These wounded men, being hurt sorely, fill'd the air with their laments. At midnight, Millicent grew fearfull lest their crys attract passing Savages. She crept out through the Stockade, & finding the wounded by their crys, clubb'd them to death with her Musket. She then crept back to the cabin, where she pass'd the time in dutifull attendance upon her Spouse. The 3d day came a troop from Plymouth Town, led by Cap'n Davenport, who convey'd them all to Ipswich, where their wounds were dressed. John & Millicent return'd to their farm, where they liv'd together 60 yrs. & were fruitfull & prospered, being bless'd of XI children, to wit:——"

So much for the first Millicent Parkins, woman of much comeliness, and her grim, heroic doings. Cross now a bridge of nigh three centuries, and look upon the eighth Millicent, of 1917.

Millicent the eighth is no Plymouth maid. Swift Rapids, Michigan, is quite good enough for her. But stand her beside the dim miniature of the first Millicent, and the eager exquisite youth of the two faces will make your breath come rather quick. Fred Barlow, who lives next door, and who used to carry Milly's school-books and ride her on his velocipede, said once that Milly looked like a snow-apple. Remember what a snow-apple is like? Rose-red, snow-white, crisp and sweet and cool? That's the eighth Millicent.

Milly's mother died when she was a baby. She

and Mr. Parkins present the armed neutrality, at once droll and pitiful, that you so often see between a bewildered elderly father and a two-fisted female child. When Milly was sixteen Mr. Parkins, with a last despairing clutch at his Victorian ideals, sent her to Mount Holyoke. Then, mortally homesick for his darling hoyden, he set out to travel. In northern Mexico he bought a silver mine. Two months later came the fall of Diaz. But Mr. Parkins continued to work his mine, although under difficulties. His lonely hacienda, far back in the mountains, was less lonely than Swift Rapids with Milly away.

Milly flourished at Mount Holyoke. She came home at twenty, a triumphant A.B., only to demand another year, "to study sociology." Mr. Parkins, rather hard hit, agreed, and went back to Mexico. One year more and Milly came home to stay; spirited, merry, far lovelier than any sociological shark has need to be.

The day she returned, Milly set to work. She started a hunt club, which put half the gilded youth of Swift Rapids into splints; she organized an Allies' relief, and thereby split the town into two sulphurously rival camps. A trifle disconcerted thereat, she put aside society for the time being, opened a neighborhood house near Mr. Parkins's stove foundry, and marshalled the community into gayly emulative clubs. A tennis league, cooking classes for the girls, two baseball nines of fryin'

size boys. The neighborhood, largely Irish, responded with zeal. The clans grew challenging, soon belligerent. The baseball nines stirred partisanship to flame. The last day of the Swift Rapids series, one grieves to chronicle that nine large, indignant fathers waded on the diamond to confer with the umpire. They were met by the nine strutting parents of the victors. Ten minutes later Milly herself thought it wise to send in a riot call. Several tennis players, seeing a long-coveted opportunity, had mixed in.

"Though it didn't amount to much, dad. And as the ambulance surgeon said, not even the worst banged-up ones seemed to regret it. I'm sorry they broke the house windows, though. Perhaps I'd best close it till feeling dies down."

Mr. Parkins drew a long, thankful breath. Milly went cheerily on.

"Yes. I'll shut up shop. And go back to New York. And study working methods."

Mr. Parkins drew another long breath. His heart dropped, lead.

"Millicent! Are you determined on this career? I had hoped——"

"You'd hoped I'd settle down? And marry Freddy Barlow?"

Mr. Parkins gulped, a guilty gulp.

"Not but what he's asked me to," limpid and serene. "Every year since I was nine. But he's too

demanding a disposition, father. If he was around me all the time, I might neglect my one real work."

Mr. Parkins gave a deep, inward groan. On Freddy Barlow, six feet high, three feet wide, sterling straight through, Mr. Parkins had long looked as on the one sustaining certainty in a reeling world. If Freddy were to fail him——

"I'll go to New York next week, dad."

"Very well. I'll run down to Durango."

"Durango!" Milly blazed, ecstatic. "Oh, I'm going, too! I'm going, too! My sociology can wait. Now that Carranza is managing so nicely, we can travel in absolute safety——"

"Absolute fiddlesticks!" Mr. Parkins's jaw set, flint. "Go to your sociology class, but not a step toward Mexico. Mind that!"

Milly's eyes widened. Rebellion from her slave was something new. Curiously, she did not insist. Instead, she set off for New York. And Mr. Parkins went to Durango.

Now, Mr. Parkins knew his Mexico. From the start, he had made terms with his laborers on a basis of honor and of kindliness. His men had repaid him, and with interest. Generous rations, decent shacks, fair wages, were promptly translated into increased output, cleanly living, honest service. For, contrary to popular belief, the average Mexican is neither a fiend nor a moon-eyed cherub; instead, a human being, and, when treated as such, a surprisingly square human being.

Hence it was with no particular dread that Mr. Parkins took the steamer for Tampico. But from Tampico to Coronilla, his village, the trip were better not described. Cattle-car, horseback, rickety wagon; lastly, sixty miles of mountain trail aboard a surly mule. When at last he rode into Coronilla the village lay in ruins. The mines were long deserted. The fields were empty. But the thirty-eight people who remained gave him a welcome that warmed his heart.

Mr. Parkins went to work. He fed and cheered his miserable folk. He set them to ploughing and building. Soon his laborers began to drift back "from the army." In three months the village was thriving. His people looked on him as he went by with reverence as well as love on their dark faces. But Mr. Parkins was not content. His tired father-heart was sick within him. He could deal wisely with these, his child-people. But had he dealt wisely with his own child, his very breath of life?

Night after night he lay and pondered miserably. Had he been just to Milly in giving her such limitless freedom? Or, by withholding guidance, had he but left her to batter her young ship against the reefs of chance?

For that question is the eternal penalty of fatherhood. And each gray vigil brought bitterer heartache and self-blame.

The weeks fled on. He had reached Coronilla in May. It was September now, and the fields were

shoulder high, and the women sang at their weaving. On a calm sunset, through the gates rode a slim, small figure on a limping mule. And as Mr. Parkins stood up, dazed, the figure tumbled off and rushed to him and fell on him with kisses that blinded and hugs that made his neck creak on its hinges.

"I wanted to see you so dreadfully, daddy! Oh, nothing particular. I—I just wanted you. Nonsense; it was an easy trip. My arm? Oh, I cut it. On broken glass. A brakeman did that, hauling me through a car-window. Our train was dynamited fifty miles out of Tampico. But some Carranzista officers had confiscated an auto-truck and they invited me to ride with them as far as Santa Lucia. And two peons brought me forty miles more on a hand-car. Then I got on a troop-train up to San Juan. There I bought this mule and came up the mountains alone. Yes, I slept out on the trail two nights, but it wasn't cold at all. Now, why don't you say you're glad to see me?"

Mr. Parkins found nothing to say. All these weeks he had starved for Milly. Now she had come to him, unscathed, through a thousand hideous dangers. He was dumb in a thankfulness past words.

Four days later another guest rode through the gates; a gaunt, sun-scorched young man. At sight of him, Mr. Parkins's sedate heart began to prance. Paternal mischief lit in his eye. But Milly's cheek burnt angry crimson.

"Freddy Barlow! What possessed you to tag, pray?"

"I tagged because the soul was scared out of me." Fred Barlow rolled off his mule and clutched the patio wall. He was so tired that he swayed on his feet; but, being Fred Barlow, he was as self-contained as a large young plaster cast of himself. "The minute I heard you'd started for Mexico I hit the trail. I've been just two jumps behind, all the way. Didn't it enter your beauteous ivory head that we're on the ragged edge of war still? And that anything—*anything*—might happen to you?"

Milly's cheek deepened.

"H'm. Since you're here, you can make yourself useful. I've been wanting to explore the ruins at Tolta. You can ride as body-guard."

"Explore Tolta!" Mr. Parkins sprang up. "My child, it's twenty miles up the mountains. And nothing there but rocks and scorpions. And bandit camps at every cross-trail. I'll not hear of it!"

"Oh, yes, you will, dad. Haven't you always felt safe about me if just Fred Barlow was along?"

Mr. Parkins, routed by the words of his own mouth, could only blink. But deep in his heart woke a queer, eager hope.

Propinquity—dangers shared—the lonely ride—who knows?

Three days later Milly and Fred rode off for a day's exploring. Mr. Parkins waved them away; but keen worry harassed him all the long day. He

was glad when sunset came. Another hour, and home through the afterglow would ride two gallant young figures, and Milly, planted on his knee, would pour out the day's story, and Fred would stand near, his grave eyes bent on Milly's sparkling face. And, later still, when Milly slipped into his room, a slim white ghost, to perch on his bed and kiss him good night, she might have still more to tell.

The last gleam faded. Mr. Parkins fidgeted. Surely they would come soon.

The sky was velvet-black now; the stars pricked out, far flames. Mr. Parkins paced from patio to gate, from gate to patio. This was not kind of Milly. She might know he would be anxious.

At gray dawn Mr. Parkins was still pacing the turf. To him then came one Alvarado, foreman of the mine. Behind him trailed the twenty-odd men that made up Coronilla's pitiful working forces.

"Señor, the señorita has not returned," said Alvarado very quietly. "Doubtless she and the young señor have lost their way. We, your servants, ride now in search of her."

"Much obliged, Alvarado," said Mr. Parkins. His lips were bloodless, his dry voice cracked. "I'll ride with you."

Before sunrise the cavalcade galloped away.

Through those long, hot, straining hours Mr. Parkins clung with a grip of steel to the belief that this search was absurdly needless. Milly and young

Barlow had been delayed and had spent the night at some friendly rancho. They had come home by another trail. At this moment they sat safely in his own patio, watching amusedly for his return. He built on that hope; he lived on it that cruel day through. And at dusk he entered his own gates, and saw awaiting him only his scared, tearful house servants: and nothing more.

Mr. Parkins had hoped too hard. His taut self-control snapped. He crumpled into his chair. He sat there, trembling.

Again to his boss came Alvarado. Alvarado was a short, squat half-breed with a pockmarked face and a villainous cross-eye. Alvarado's natural charms were not enhanced by the fact that he had ridden fourteen hours in blistering heat, searching for his master's daughter as a man searches for fine gold. Which was all in the day's work for Alvarado. Had not the señor fed his blind father, and healed his boy of a fever?

"Señor," said Alvarado, "we men will take fresh horses and ride in a great circle the night through. We will hunt the hills past the deserted mines."

Parkins lifted his ashen face.

"No, Alvarado. You men are dog-tired. More, you'd never find them by night. To-morrow we'll try again."

"But to-morrow is another day."

"No."

"Señor, I have spoken." Alvarado stood humbly

before his lord: but his voice rang finality. "To-day—perhaps the señorita has yet water in her canteen. By to-night she will have drank it, all. We must find her before the sun grows high."

Mr. Parkins stared. Suddenly he wilted back in his chair. Alvarado tramped away.

Mr. Parkins sat very still. From the courtyard came the stamp of tired mules, the smell of frying meat. Presently there rang a clatter of departing hoofs.

After a while Conchita, the cook, came, bringing his bacon and beans and coffee. She rapped twice; then she pushed the door ajar and waddled in. What she saw sent her waddling out again, with her rebozo screwed to her eyes.

She scuttled across the garden, then away down the empty road to the house of the padre. At the door, she stopped and burrowed into her generous girdle. Only six centavos, the last coppers of her wages. However, six centavos would buy a blessed candle, with a little coaxing. And it was for the señorita, the laughing señorita who was as the blood of the señor's heart.

Gripping the precious six centavos in a pudgy palm, she knocked. Ten minutes later she set a tall white candle before Our Lady's tiny shrine and lighted it with careful hands. A long hour she knelt there, her fat arms raised straight up like a wooden doll, her black braids trailing on the stone floor.

Up in his room Mr. Parkins sat alone. The

room was black dark now. A cooler air blew down from the mountains. A few inquisitive stars peered in.

The wind grew stronger. It sighed and wailed like a creature that searches, and searches, but cannot find. Against the window the grape-vine tapped like groping fingers. Mr. Parkins did not stir.

Somewhere past midnight the wind fell. A waning moon climbed the sky. An hour more, and the air that blew through the room grew cold as wind from off a glacier. The wind before the dawn was coming: the stark cold wind that blows of death.

After a while, the darkness seemed to thin, slowly. The moon grew white as bone. Up from the east filtered a gray light, stark and cold. Then, and not till then, did Mr. Parkins get up from his chair and stand looking out at the huddled huts, the wall of mountains, the gray and awful sky. But his drawn lips muttered still, as they had muttered the night through:

"My headstrong little daughter! My little, little girl! God, what's the use? *What's the use?*"

The sun rose swiftly, a molten golden flare. Away down the trail, something moved, slowly. Mechanically Mr. Parkins stared at that far vague phantom.

Suddenly he staggered against the window. He cried aloud, a harsh and rasping cry. He dashed out of the room, tore down the patio stairs, jerked

a sleepy mule from the feed-trough, galloped away.

One-half hour later, Mr. Parkins, white to his lips but indomitably calm, sat in his own room once more. On his lap sat a shockingly dirty young woman in a tattered-and-torn riding-habit. An equally grimy young man, further adorned with a black eye and a swollen nose, sat in the window-seat. Another young man, triced from chin to knee in tidy bandages, sprawled dead asleep on Mr. Parkins's cot. Down in the patio sat Alvarado and his men, heroes all, surrounded by a flustration of womenfolk, all feeding them at once.

"Dad, dear, I'm sorry you were anxious. But listen. We left here day before yesterday morning, you know, and we put in a glorious day exploring. We started back at four, by what I thought would be a short cut through a canyon. It was shorter—maybe. But we butted straight into an outlaw camp."

"Oh. That was it."

"Yes. That was it. And it was most unpleasant. They saw us first and had us covered before either of us could draw our guns. They marched us into camp and took away our revolvers, and handed me over to their women—a half-dozen of 'em, crowded around a camp-kettle—and hog-tied poor Fred and stuck him up against a boulder. At night they gave us each some water and a gourdful of stew—woof!" Milly's lovely dirty face twitched. "Then one woman offered to share her blanket with me. I accepted,

for manners. But by two o'clock I decided I'd rather crawl outside and sit up. I did. Presently a shadow came down the arroyo and stooped down and whispered: 'Come along. Let's beat it.'

"It was Fred, of course. I didn't ask any questions. I rose up and beat it. Fifty yards down the trail stood a man holding our horses. As we mounted he gave us our guns, then faded back into the night.

"We coaxed our horses through the sandy arroyo till we were out of earshot, then galloped for dear life. At daybreak we stopped at a water-hole. There Fred explained our escape. That amiable brigand used to work for you, daddy. He was a mine laborer three years ago. He recognized the brand on our horses and questioned Fred. When Fred told him I was your daughter he just said, Bueño, and went away. But at two o'clock he shook Fred awake, cut his lariat, then brought the horses and guns. How under the moon he got those automatics away from the chief! Fred thinks he must have stuck a knife into him. Whatever he did do, I'm sure we're much obliged to him.

"We filled our canteens and started on. Not a mile farther, and we saw a troop of cavalry dead ahead. We were caught between two fires. Cavalry ahead; brigands behind.

" 'This means, take to the hills,' said Fred. We hid the horses up a gully and crawled in between heaps of boulders, very snaky. I slept all morning

while Fred watched. Then I let him sleep while I watched. It wasn't any fun at all. We were hungry and thirsty and mad, and that cavalry simply would not move on. At dusk Fred said: 'Let's risk a dash for it.' Dash we did. But, swinging around a hill, didn't we ride straight into a battle!"

"A battle?"

"Well, a skirmish. A right lively skirmish. Bullets went whining over our heads, and of all the yelling you ever heard! We scuttled up the nearest draw, lickety-cut. We were fairly trapped, this time. And it got blacker and blacker. Hardly any starlight, even.

"Suddenly the shooting and yelling died down. Not ten yards away fled a rush of dark figures; then silence. Soon we heard a voice moaning. Then another voice began to yell like sixty."

"Wounded bandits?"

"Yes. But the longer we listened to the yelling one, the less he listened like a bandit. Instead of calling in Spanish, he kept howling over and over: 'Oh, golly! Oh, my laig! Say, for Pete's sake, can't some of youse hike down and roll this horse offen me? Say, it weighs a ton. Say, hurry! For God's sake, *hurry!*'

"Finally I couldn't stand it. I told Fred it might be a trap, but I'd rather be trapped than sit still and know that that poor moaning creature was breathing his last, and the cross, noisy one was

being squashed to profane pulp. Fred said: 'No, you don't go down there. Not on your life.' That's the way—" She halted, gave Fred a small, remorseful grin.

"Shoot, Milly," urged Fred nobly.

"Well, that's the way he got that black eye. I lost my patience and gave him a swift punch, and it landed on his cheek-bone and made it bleed. As well as swelled his eye shut. Somehow, that broke me all up. I began to bawl, and Fred said: 'Never mind, black the other eye if you like.' And he was such a duck about it that I bawled worse than ever, and told him— Oh, no matter what I told him. And after that we wasted a lot of time." Her clear cheek glowed with the softest fire, the pure, transparent flush of a snow-apple; her gray eyes fell. "Then I said: 'Come along, we'll go now and find our bandits.' And Fred said all right, if I'd promise to shoot myself in case it proved an ambush, and they killed him, and I promised. So off we scrambled.

"We tried to pussy-foot, but in that solid dark we stubbed our toes on everything in reach. We sounded like two scared elephants. But I guess we sounded pretty good to that blasphemous young man under his horse. Gracious, when he realized we'd come to help him! I didn't know there were so many joyful swear words in the dictionary.

"We hauled his dead horse off him and yanked him off the pile of shale he was lying on and laid

"I took his poor little scrawny hand and shut the crucifix in"

[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

him on a grassy place. Between yowls he kept hurling orders at Fred. 'Git that girl out of here! Leave me alone and scoot with her. That doggone crowd will come riding back, sure's you're born. Clear out. Never mind me!' But Fred told him to calm down. Then we blundered off to find the other man. We had to hunt a good bit, for the moaning had stopped. When we did find him, we—there was nothing we could do."

Her racing voice faltered, then.

"He'd had no chance from the start, poor little fellow. Yes, I suppose he was an outlaw. But he couldn't have been more than sixteen, a little, slim, half-grown boy, no bigger than my cousin Joel at Concord. He was awfully thin, too. Under his torn shirt his poor little ribs stuck up, starved. He didn't stir when Fred turned the pocket-flash on his face, but his lips moved. Then I saw the crucifix tied round his neck: a brass one on a red cotton string. I took his poor little scrawny hand and shut the crucifix in. His lips moved again and his hand sort of gripped on the crucifix. Then he was gone, just as if you'd blown out a candle.

"I laid my handkerchief over his face, and we piled brush around him, then went back to our first find. He thought we'd hit the trail by this time, and his remarks fairly scalded us. Inside, he was weepy-grateful, just the same. He was cold and pretty limp, so I sat and held as much of him on my lap as I could, and Fred took off his boots

and rubbed his feet. Between shivers he explained that he wasn't a bandit at all. He's a pin-feathered Texas ranger, who'd been surprised and gobbled on a raid, and he'd broken away, only to have his horse shot under him. His name is John C. Armbruster, and he was born in Peoria, Illinois, and he'll be twenty his next birthday. Wouldn't Fred and I feel sweet if we'd left him under his horse to die?

"After untold ages, it was dawn. John C. kept begging us to go and leave him, and we knew we ought to strike for home, but we couldn't desert that poor lamb. Finally I climbed a little hill for a look-see. The luckiest thing I ever did. There, not half a mile away, galloped Alvarado and his men. I waved and shouted. Did Alvarado respond? He only hit the high places. We hoisted John C. on behind Alvarado and headed for home. And that's all."

She stopped, her eyes on her father's face. But Mr. Parkins did not dare to speak. Had he tried to express himself it must have been in tears, the tears of a joy almost as terrible as grief. For this, his child, was dead, yet was alive again. This, his heart's darling, was lost, and yet was found.

"I hope, daughter," he said at length, in his curt, precise voice, "that you have thought to thank Frederick for his care of you."

"Oh, I've squared myself with Fred, all right." She put out a grimy little hand and patted Fred's

arm. "I've told him I'm going to marry him. As soon as we get back to Swift Rapids."

"You're going to marry Fred——"

Over Mr. Parkins's tired face came a sudden light: the light of an amazement, a contentment past all words.

"But—your sociology——"

"Oh, I sha'n't abandon that. But the fact is, father, a good deal of that sociology stunt was bluff, you know." Milly lifted tranquil eyes. She spoke out with the shameless candor of her young shameless generation. "I've really meant to marry Fred, right along. Only I wanted to be certain sure that I was in love with Fred himself. Not just in love with love. There's a difference." Her cheek brightened to scarlet, but she spoke evenly on. "So I took up that special work, to see if it wouldn't shove Fred into the background. And—it didn't. Then I went to New York, to get a better perspective. But he filled the whole place. Then I came down to Mexico. I thought, from this distance, I could put him where he belonged. But he keeps right on being the whole thing. So I might as well marry him. No, you don't understand, dad. I didn't expect you would."

Mr. Parkins did not ask to understand. His eyes clung to his girl, then turned to the face of the boy; the boy that he had loved and relied upon ever since he was a wee chap in starchy kilts, sturdily trundling Milly on his velocipede. Into

Mr. Parkins's face came a flame of pride, a pride that exalted. For such a pride, heaven be praised, is sometimes the portion of fatherhood.

Quaintly enough, that pride was in nowise for himself. Quite unaware that he had honored the stock from which he sprang by keeping faith with those who trusted him, by dealing nobly with his humble people, Mr. Parkins saw only his own child's nobility. His daughter, braver than her brave ancestress. Mr. Parkins's eyes shone.

"I have always been proud of that story they tell of your great-grandmother, the first Millicent," he said, a little huskily. "But I'll admit I'm prouder yet of you, you reckless young hussy. Because—you didn't risk your life crawling out to club your enemies. You risked it venturing out to save them, instead. History repeats itself, they say. Sometimes, my dear, history improves on itself."

His lean little arms shut round her with a sudden gripping clutch. Milly looked up at him. It is not in Milly's brusque young generation to speak its heart. But all her heart flamed out in the brusque, half-laughing words:

"Well, Daddy Parkins! All I can say is, history will have to get busy if she wants to improve upon a gentleman like you!"

ON A BRIEF TEXT FROM ISAIAH

THREE men sat on a lordly California terrace, beneath a dazzling autumn sun, and strove with one accord, though diverse tongues, to give me some insight into the Mexican situation. The first man was fifty, and fat, and masterful, not to say bullying. A gloomy survivor of Porfirio Diaz' day, a stockholder in certain deserted Chihuahua mines, he hourly lifts his voice for pacification by force, that his rock may be smitten and flow again with juicy dividends.

"Look at the insolence of Carranza, will you? 'Mexico for Mexicans,' hey? Why, this continent belongs to white men. That's the fiat of destiny. Mexicans don't deserve a country, anyhow. They've got no vim, no initiative, no commercial sense. They don't even care to make money. Intervention? Of course it'll come to intervention in the end, for all our shilly-shallying. The sooner that mongrel breed is cleaned out the better. Cruel? Destiny is always cruel. And always just."

The second man squirmed on his marble bench. He was stooped and yellow and sunken-eyed, a fever-burnt missionary from Yucatan.

"No need to miscall the race so harshly, sir.

Though I'll admit they're a lamentable type. So apathetic that they will not even destroy the last fragments of their debased faith and turn from it to a higher faith. Only an intervention that will change their whole basis of thought can redeem Mexico. In that process, the population must needs be largely obliterated. True: the march of progress is always cruel to the casual eye."

The third man heard his comrades' eloquence in silence. He was a civil engineer, twenty-two years in Mexico; lean, lantern-jawed, oddly tranquil. At length, when my instructors had had their say, with repetitions and vociferations, and had strolled off down the terrace, he spoke.

"There go two as honest fools as God's sun shines on. But the minute they cross the Rio Grande they go blind—Anglo-Saxon blind. Can't see that any other race has the right to exist. So destructive intervention is the only way out for Mexico, eh? Well, they ought to talk to my friend Cory, Ethan A. Cory, San Angelo, Puebla. He'd open their eyes for them. Cory has a new theory of intervention, all his own, based on a rock-bottom understanding of Mexico. A right good theory, I call it. Want to listen?"

I listened.

"Cory's experience is typical. He's a Montpelier boy, sixth in line from hawk-nosed old Ethan Allen himself. Big, shrewd, quiet, just. Put him into cocked hat and knee-breeches, and you'd swear

it was his Green Mountain granddaddy stepped down from his State-House pedestal. Mrs. Cory was Minnie May Averill, a Montpelier girl with a generous dash of Stark blood. A little fair, spunky piece; the kind of woman that always makes the muffins for breakfast, and sings around the house in a blue gingham dress with ruffles on it. She'd married Cory in the firm conviction that he'd made the moon and hung it up and set the stars a-going, and ten years of married life hadn't jolted that conviction. Not so you could notice it. A well-matched pair.

"They came down to Mexico twelve years ago and bought a big coffee-place, away off the beaten track. Thirty miles by mule-back up mountain trails from Cristobal and the railroad, eighty miles from Mexia and the nearest American colony. Scenery? All the glories of this world, heaped up. But lonesome? Little San Angelo is the hardest place on earth to reach, and plumb impossible to get away from.

"They bought a big, crumbling hacienda, once owned by a Spanish grandee, all pink stucco and torn brocade and tarnished gilt. It made you grin to see their impeccable household gear set against that shiftless splendor. The crayon enlargements of Uncle Lemuel and Aunt Parthenia, for instance, hung to conceal a particularly candid fresco—nymphs and satyrs—that had once charmed the departed grandee's eye. And the first year, set against the lives around them, the Corys' lives stuck up considerably

out of drawing. The laborers drifted through their days contentedly, to Cory's Yankee ire. The cook stole regularly, according to tradition. The house-girls got into stabbing scrapes over dreamy-eyed village loafers, which grieved and bewildered Minnie May. She never could realize that her Mexican maids were different flesh and blood—and fire—from starchy Montpelier 'help,' and she spent much fruitless time striving to teach them the truly womanly reserves; to their honest bewilderment, too, I reckon. Across the Rio Grande it's—different. But soon the Corys shook down. Cory's men learned to respect him and to do their leisurely best for him. Minnie May's household loved her dearly. The whole village loved her, for that matter. Then their children came, little steps; four boys, splendid little fellows. And what with Cory's coffee fetching top-notch prices, and Mrs. Cory getting prettier and happier every year, it was a mighty good old world for Ethan A. Cory, Esquire.

"Along 1910 came queer fretting rumors. Nothing to worry about, thought Cory. But the rumors grew. One fine day, when his mozo rode back from Cristobal with the weekly mail-bag, Cory gaped, astounded, at the news of Diaz' overthrow. However, the Diaz machine wasn't run on Green Mountain principles, you know. The Corys owned an inward hope that a new régime, while not so smooth-running, might bring relief to poor little battered Mexico.

"Well, they kept on hoping, and working, and

being happy, although the boons to the peons didn't materialize at once. Cory's men grew restless; drifted away to fight with one Liberator or another. Vicente, a coffee-picker, led off one squad right under Cory's wrathy eyes. Vicente wasn't much loss, though. He was a spoiled, arrogant kid, one of the handsome scamps who hung around and kept Minnie May's dove-cot in a flutter. Mind that name, Vicente. It's coming up later.

"Soon their few American neighbors began to pack their wives and children back to the States. Then Cory got annoying letters from his agent at Mexia. Why did he keep sending mule trains of coffee when the railroad to Vera Cruz was cut off half the time? But none of these things moved the Corys. Their house was stocked with every comfort. The ranch produced everything needed for food. All they need do was sit tight.

"After a year, sitting tight got monotonous. After two years it got on their nerves. Month after month, Cory had urged Minnie May to go back to the States. Minnie May had hooted at him. You couldn't pry her away from Cory with a crowbar. But suddenly, in October, 1914, they faced grim emergency. Minnie May must go north to her mother at once. There was no American physician within five days now, no nurses, no nothing. Minnie May must start without delay.

"Well, Minnie cried a solid week. But Cory had put his Green Mountain foot down. I happened

in on them the morning she started. Of course I rode with them down the mountains to Cristobal. It was a rough ride, all right, that knife-edge trail. When at last we reached the lone little station, and I saw Cory and his family aboard the providential engine and ore-car that had happened along, I sure was thankful. Later, I heard that our trail had been the easiest stretch of the trip. When I tell you that it took them eight days to travel ninety miles and that their trains were dynamited twice, you can imagine the rest.

"Cory saw 'em off at Vera Cruz, then toiled back to San Angelo and sat down in his crumbling pink palace, with only the unabashed nymphs and Uncle Lemuel and Aunt Parthenia for company. And one eternal year he worked his plantation, and listened to the weird rumors that floated up from the lowlands, and wrote long letters to Minnie May—and waited. He was the only American short of Mexia. Half that year he never saw a white face. That year aged him, believe me! But once in six weeks or so, when a bunch of mail scrabbled through, he'd brace up. All had gone well with his wife. Her kid sister Patty's wild, ecstatic letter, telling of the new baby's safe coming, was followed by Minnie May's own letters, afire with joy. A girl baby, a real girl baby at last, and, oh, such a darling! She herself was well, the baby thriving, the little boys were happy in their school. Cory fed his starved heart on those letters.

"At last, one November morning in 1915, a vaquero rode up the hill with some ancient newspapers. On the front page of the *Mexican Herald*, Cory read, with amazement, of Carranza's belated 'recognition.'

"'Bully! There's the first glimmer of peace! But, Lucio! Only papers? Have you no letters for me?'

"'Si, señor.' Lucio fished up a grimed handful, tied inside his shirt. Cory tore open the first at hand. Then he gasped.

"News of Carranza's new status had reached Montpelier, Vermont, two weeks before it had filtered up to San Angelo. Minnie May, frantic with delight, was starting back on the first steamer. Yes, he'd scold her for coming, but she couldn't wait. The new baby would never again be such a perfect angel-duck as she was this minute. Cory must see her and help gloat. The little boys teased daily to go back to daddy. Patty had set her young heart on seeing Mexico. And she—'Oh, Ethan Allen Cory, I'm coming Home! Home! Home! I'll sail into Vera Cruz harbor November 26 at the latest. So there!'

"Cory sat limp. November 26—and this was the 24th! By no miracle could he reach Vera Cruz in time. Moreover, his Minnie wouldn't wait around Vera Cruz for him. Not she. Innocently confident that recognition spelled safety, she and that freckled romp of a Patty, and the little boys and that ineffably precious new baby, would start off through

a country utterly lawless, swarming with bandits, a country of poisoned wells, of deserted towns, drained, pillaged, brutalized. By sheer luck, she might find a train going through to Cristobal. By greater luck, her train might not be dynamited. But, when the railroad ended, what of the three days' lonely climb, up through the mountains, on stumbling, half-starved mules? Gangs of outlaws held the mountain passes. Dangers unspeakable waited there for her. Worse yet, there were three trails up from Cristobal. If he chose the wrong trail and missed her——

"Of course, he took the wrong trail. He went tearing down the shortest cut, to find that Minnie May and her cavalcade had started up the longer way two days before. Half-distracted, he started back. Naturally, he spurred his poor beast off a ledge, pitched into undergrowth twenty feet below, and broke his leg. Fortunately the mule wasn't damaged. Somehow Cory crawled back aboard and made his way home. When he finally got there, Minnie May hadn't arrived! Cory put in twenty-four hours of agony before she showed up. Cheerful as a chipmunk, she rode through her own gates and flew to Cory's arms.

"Well, I reckon there never was such a royal home-coming. To be sure, Minnie May was heartbroken over Cory's smashed leg. But she got in the native bone-setter, and he made a fair job of it. This accomplished, she just gave herself up to ecstasy.

As for Cory—Well! What with Minnie May, prettier than ever, and her peach of a sister, and his boys, and his brand-new baby, I reckon paradise wouldn't be a patch on San Angelo for him.

"Back in Vermont, Uncle Lemuel and Aunt Parthenia had died and left Minnie May the maple-sugar grove. Minnie May had blown herself accordingly. She'd brought a dray-load of canned grub and quinine, new rugs, a pianola, linen, books. Further, knowing her dear adopted people mighty well, she'd invested in a barrel of Speed's sausage and a hundred pounds of peppermint sticks. Also a trunkful of blinding red-and-green serapes, ribbons, beads—heaven knows what all. Christmas Day she called all San Angelo, forty-six strong, up to the hacienda and held a fiesta. I rode up in the midst of it. It was worth seeing. Right under the breezy nymphs on the sala ceiling stood the tree, a glossy little magnolia trimmed up like a fire-horse. A china angel hung on the top bough; five Toltec gods, in jasper and onyx, grinned from the background. The pianola was going like mad; the citizenry squatted in goggling rows around the tree, their mouths full of sausages and their eyes full of awe. No, it wasn't a conventional Montpelier Christmas, but it looked mighty good to me.

"They had one month of perfect happiness. Then —the deluge.

"Cory had guarded the village's crops closely. He'd planned each year's harvest so it would last

till the next one. So far, no stragglers had entered to loot. The place was too inaccessible. But now, by January, 1916, the Carranzistas were holding central Mexico, and the Villistas and Zaps and freebooters were being driven back and back. They were short of food, they were making forays up the mountains. At daybreak, January 20, up the canyon trail tore a yelling crew and fell on sleeping San Angelo like wolves.

"The people were completely cowed. Not a shot was fired, while the raiders swept up their scanty cattle and grain. But an Indian boy slipped out and fled up the hill to warn the señor. Fifteen good minutes, that fleet-footed youngster gave Cory. Cory utilized those minutes, all right. Game leg forgotten, he roused the household, ordered cattle and horses driven into the patio, portioned out ammunition.

"'They won't dare break down the gates. A gringo's gates are inviolable, thank the Lord!' he said to Minnie May. Right then, that howling troop dashed up the hill. They reached the gates. There rose a whoop. Three men, carrying axes, leaped off their horses and smashed the gates with half a dozen blows.

"'My horses! And my cattle! All right in reach!'

"'Well, they sha'n't have the baby's cow. So there!' Minnie May flashed across the sala, tore open the door, rushed into the patio. She grasped

the baby's meek little Jersey by her rope, jerked her into the sala, thrust her behind the pianola, and swung a pink velvet portière over her. Cory had just gumption enough to hobble across and bolt the door before the whole crew clamored into the patio.

"With glad yelps, three men pounced on the cows and horses and drove them away. The rest ransacked the store-houses. Cory said his blood sizzled to see 'em carrying off the provender he had so carefully saved. It nearly killed him not to shoot. But they were fifty men to his six, and he knew that his sole chance to save the casa would lie in holding his fire. To anger that swarm of hornets would mean ruin, and then some.

"Soon the leader and half his gang rode to the door and demanded admittance. Cory parleyed from a window above. His family wished not to be disturbed. If his amigo, the general, desired to show courtesy to an American household, he would now retire, taking whatever stock and provisions he chose.

"The general reflected. Fingers twitching on his gun, Cory hung at the window. Minnie May, white-lipped, stood close by. She held her own small but efficient automatic hidden below the sill.

"Presently the general spoke, with dignity. He wished not to molest the family of the señor. But he must secure certain supplies. He needed quinine. Also gold. Doubtless the señor had a generous hoard of both. The señor would kindly open the door. At once.

"That monumental gall made Cory see red. But right then, up pipes Minnie May. She stood there, no bigger than a pint cup, her fair hair loose on her shoulders, her cheeks crimson. Her blue eyes were fixed on the leader's face. They fairly shot sparks.

" 'Señor the general will request his men to withdraw. We have neither gold nor quinine to share.'

"Señor the general got his breath with an effort.

" 'Señora, best permit us to enter. For enter we shall——' "

" 'Enter, your men may, señor.' Like lightning Minnie May brought her gun up from the sill, levelled it at the general's head. 'Yes. Your men may enter. But, alas, señor, they will enter without a leader.'

"Cory never did know what happened next. But he saw the general take a step toward the door.

"Instantly Minnie May blazed away. So did Patty. So did Cory. So did Cory's five men-servants. The leader keeled over on his horse's neck.

"The troop wasn't expecting such a fusillade. With a screech and a yell they fired one scattering volley, then wheeled and tore off down the hill. The general galloped swaying behind.

"Minnie May and Cory looked at each other. Three very dead bandits lay in the trampled patio. Not one of their little garrison had a scratch. But the uproar had waked the baby. She was screaming the roof off.

Instantly Minnie May blazed away

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"'Well, Minnie May Averill!' said Cory feebly. But Minnie May had flown to her youngest.

"'Naughty man woke her up, the blessed!' she crooned. 'But he didn't get her own bossy. So there!'

"That was why she'd risked her life to keep the raiders out, see? She was afraid bossy might poke her head from behind the pianola.

"That night they two figured up stock. It wasn't a pleasant job. The raiders had cleaned up San Angelo to a fare-you-well. They'd taken not only cattle and supplies. They'd carried off the eight able-bodied men in the village. That left just thirty-eight folks: women, children, a few old men. Of Cory's household there were nine servants besides his family of seven. Fifty-four people to be kept alive till spring—and next to nothing to feed them on!

"Finally they hit on a plan. When the alarm came that morning, Cory's vaquero had saved five mules by hiding them up a ravine. Locked in the casa storeroom stood three barrels of flour and some cases of canned stuff. In the village there remained a few sacks of meal and beans. Cory decided to take over whatever food he could find in the town. To that he would add the bulk of his own store. This heap he would divide equitably between the village families. He and his family would then pack what food remained on the shoulders of his men,

clamber on the five mules, and strike off down the mountains for Mexala.

"It would be a hideously dangerous trip. The canyons were alive with raiders. The trails were washed out by heavy rains. But once they reached Mexala they would be safe. From there they could send back food to poor San Angelo. If they stayed here they could starve, along with San Angelo. Simple and convincing.

"Start they did, two days later. Twelve miles down, on the rim of a dizzy cliff, the mozo in the lead came running back, breathless. He beckoned Cory: he pointed ahead.

"Fifty feet ahead, a cloudburst had struck. It had ripped out the whole mountainside. The narrow ledge on which they rode stopped short against a perpendicular wall. Cliffs to the right: a chasm to their left. Nothing to do but turn back.

"A day's rest, and they started again. This time they'd made only eight miles when they saw, strung out along the canyon river below, a troop of ragamuffin cavalry. Luckily the men hadn't seen them. And you can bet Cory lost no time in hurrying his crowd back out of sight. A day's climb took them home again.

" 'One more trail left. And one more try,' said Minnie May, with her firm little Stark jaw set. 'If we can't make the third trail we'll come back, and I'll raise parsley in a window-box. We can live on that."

"One more try. Half-way down, one of those blithering tropic rain-storms descended on them. They huddled under a cliff overhang. In the confusion a vaquero neglected to hobble the mules securely. When the storm passed, three of those sacred beasts had wandered away. They never saw those mules again.

"That was a body blow. No Mexia now. Cory stacked his family on the three remaining mules. It was midnight when, for the third time, they rode up to their hacienda. At sight of those simpering nymphs and Uncle Lemuel's crayon glare, Minnie May went into hysterics. It was the end of her rope, poor little plucky thing. But by morning she was her brave self again.

" 'We'll hold on for two weeks, Ethan. By that time, maybe, something will happen.'

"Four mortal weeks they held on. It was the height of the rainy season. Wind and storm beat down without mercy. Cory was pegged out. But Minnie May took command. She ordered all San Angelo up to the hacienda and quartered them in the granaries; she fed them as lavishly as she dared. She petted them, and coddled them, and kept them happy. She used to wind up the pianola for 'em daily. Cory said he'd lie there on his pink-and-gold divan and watch his wife and Patty doing the fox-trot for the wide-eyed groups in the doorways, and wonder if he was quite mad or only touched.

"Three older people died that month. Cory gave

'em each a gorgeous funeral. Nothing on earth so delights the Mexican heart as a real flabbergaster of a funeral. Minnie May took down the pink velvet curtains from the sala and handed 'em over for shrouds. San Angelo exulted. No such grandeur was ever known.

"'They'd never dry-clean, anyhow,' said Minnie May simply. 'And we'll give each mourner a sausage and a stick of peppermint. I wish I'd brought a carload of sausage instead of a barrel.'

"The bean-sacks thinned down ominously. Minnie May was scraping the flour-bin. At last, one wet, gray morning, a panicky herder tore in. Another gang of raiders was riding up the hill.

"'Let 'em come. Precious little they'll find,' sniffed Minnie May. Again she secluded the baby's cow, this time in the hacienda chapel. Again Cory ordered his people inside and bolted the gates. But right then up dashed a second herder, waving his hat.

"'Señor! Señor! It is not raiders! It is Vicente! Vicente!'

"'Vicente?' Before Cory came a moment's sight of the Vicente of 1910: a slim, handsome young vagabond, loafing around the coffee-trees and casting starry glances at the giggling maids. The Vicente who had pelted gayly away 'to join the Revolutionists, señor.' But the Vicente who came riding through the gates was different. Here was an arrogant young cavalier in muddy khaki, with a cut

and flourish that made Cory long to hand him one, the minute he swaggered in.

"The populace surged up with yells of welcome. Vicente swung off his sombrero to 'em, for all the world like the young heir returning to his cheering tenantry. He jumped off his horse, saluted Cory with distinct condescension, bowed over Minnie May's hand, then addressed Cory with august calm. He had now attained the rank of first lieutenant under Zapata, señor. In battle he and his twenty ragged scamps had been cut off from the main army and were now on their way to Guadalajara, the Zap stronghold. They were short of food, ammunition, money. Therefore he had led them to San Angelo, knowing that the señor and his village would joyfully supply their needs.

"Cory didn't reply. Instead, he motioned Vicente to follow. He led the way through stripped barns and empty storehouses. He opened the casa cupboards: he pointed to the last sagging meal-sack.

"Vicente saw. Black eyes narrowed, he took it all in.

" 'I comprehend, señor.' Majestically he bowed himself away. Majestically he strode back to the populace, which crowded round him with deafening chatter. Cory went to find Minnie May.

" 'I can't even ask Vicente and his men to dinner,' sighed Minnie May. 'It makes me feel so miserly! And Vicente was such a nice boy, even

if he did steal sugar and flirt with the house-girls.'

"Cory hobbled about the house, restless and miserable. Of course Vicente was a nice boy. But there was something sinister in his coming. Cory thought of the small fortune in United States bills and gold stored in his wall safe. If Vicente suspected that hoard—Vicente, who could never keep his fingers out of the sugar-bowl——

"An hour later Vicente strode haughtily to the great door. Again he salaamed to Cory with the grace of a young hidalgo. Again Cory yearned to punch his beauteous face in.

" 'Señor, in this hour I have spoken with my own people.' He waved toward the populace squatted in the patio. 'They tell me many things. They tell me that, through the first years of war, you kept them at work, and paid them, when there was no chance of shipping your coffee.'

" 'Y-yes.' Cory was puzzled. He wasn't looking for this line of talk. 'But I was always expecting things would quiet down and the roads open again.'

" 'True. But, meantime, your wages kept them in comfort. They have never suffered lack. When workers at other ranchos have gone hungry, your men were fed each day.'

"Cory didn't answer. Vicente lighted a cigarette, took a reflective puff, tossed it away.

" 'A month ago, señor, when raiders looted San Angelo, you abandoned all hope of peace for months to come. But you did not abandon my people.

With what grain you had, you fed them. With what medicines you had, you ministered to their sick. With all splendor you have honored their dead. To my people, you and the señora have been as their father and their mother.'

"Cory frowned. What was all this bombast leading up to?

"'To-day, señor, I and my army have come in triumph to San Angelo.' He waved a grandiloquent hand. 'But we find only ashes on deserted hearths. Therefore we must ride on to Guadalajara.'

"Cory drew a stealthy breath. Glory hallelujah!

"'We would take with us all our people. But they have neither horses nor mules. They could not make the hard trail. Instead, I and my men will make a dash to the plains and send back provision to carry them till harvest. If—' he paused, 'if that you will give to them, to-day, what store of food remains to you.'

"Cory groped for his gun. Give up the bread he and his family were living on, eh? So that was it!

"'Give up all,' the cool young voice went on, 'save what you and your family will need on five days' journey.'

"'Journey? What journey?'

"'For the five days, señor, that you and your children will ride with us. Under our guard. To Mexala.'

"Cory's head swam.

"'You mean——'

"'I mean, señor, that I now place myself and my army at your service.' Vicente arose, with a magnificent salute. 'Above all things, you desire to take the señora and your children to Mexia. But three times over your plan is frustrated. The dangers are too great. To-day you can go in safety. I and my army—' He waved toward the ragged crew in the patio. 'We will guard you, señor! Under our protection you will ride safe from all terrors!'

"Cory sat dazed. Finally he said he must have an hour to decide. He went to Minnie May.

"'Ride with Vicente and his men to Mexala? You better believe we will!' Minnie May dropped the baby and executed a wild Highland fling. 'Afraid of treachery? Fiddlesticks! I'd ride with Vicente to the border and be thankful for the chance!'

"That settled it. Go they did, at daybreak next morning. I reckon Cory felt pretty sick. He felt he was taking his wife and the kids straight into a trap. But to stay in starving San Angelo was to stay in a trap. He could take his choice.

"He had to do all the worrying. The little boys were jubilant at the adventure. Patty was having the time of her young life. I'd judge that, back in Montpelier, Patty's most lurid experience had been a carefully chaperoned high-school so-

ciable. Nothing else could account for the way she bubbled over. Minnie May was the gayest of all. She rode a white mule, with the baby in a pannier slung beside her. It must have looked a bit like the Flight into Egypt. She trotted down those glassy trails as contented as if she sat in a rocking-chair in her own sala. She laughed at Cory's long face. Vicente deceive them! Vicente, who used to steal cookies from her own pantry! Besides, Vicente had an ugly bullet scratch which she was dressing. You know how blandly maternal a woman feels toward the man whose hurts she has bound up. Vicente a traitor? She'd as soon expect treachery from the baby's cow.

"Cory told me afterward that her unconcern, in the face of their ghastly danger, made him a little sicker than anything else.

"Three days and nights they crept down the mountains, inching along, so short of mules that half the crowd must take turns riding. Nights they camped on the wet hillside. Not much sleep for Cory. The riding tormented his game leg; and every hour brought some new dread. Why in heaven's name had he trusted Vicente? Vicente, who must know that his señor carried wealth past counting! Without doubt he had confederates by scores, lurking along these black canyons. What more easy than an ambush, a swift attack, the regrettable death of the señor and his family—

then a tidy division of the proceeds? No. I reckon Cory didn't waste much time in sleep.

"On the fourth day the ambush came.

"It didn't last long. A clatter of falling stones on the trail ahead: a rush of mounted men: then Cory found himself thrusting Minnie May and the kids up a gully and cramming his second automatic into Minnie May's hands.

" 'Don't shoot till you've got to!' he yelled back. Then he rode straight into the fracas, firing as he went. Minnie May knew her duty. Trust her Green Mountain blood for that. Cory fought on like a demon, loading, firing, slashing with his machete: but all the time his soul was reeling within him. If worst came to worst— What if Minnie May wouldn't have nerve to shoot all five children? What if Patty, that freckled young noodle, should lose her head and strike the gun from her sister's hand? What if Minnie May fired too soon? Or—oh, God! What if she waited too long!

"Yes, it must have been a strained session for Cory. But it didn't last long. It seemed to him that he'd been galloping and firing for ages, when he suddenly realized that the attacking force was giving way. Right along with that lovely thought came another one: an explosion in his game leg. He pitched off his mule in a heap.

"When he came back, it was to a world made up of seventeen different kinds of torment. But

none of 'em counted one-two-three with Cory when they told him that the scrap was over and the raiders had scattered, leaving their dead. That proved Vicente and his men were loyal, you see. Cory had been stewing himself to pulp for nothing. He fainted again for sheer relief. Next thing he knew, his wife and Patty and Vicente were working over the bullet-hole in his leg. None of them had much surgical skill, and I dare say they gave him a rough time of it. Mrs. Cory and Patty wept steadily over their wounded darling, which didn't enliven things. But Cory took it smiling. He could afford to smile. He was badly shot up and in atrocious pain. He was on a mountain trail, under convoy of a gang of Zap outlaws, with his wife and his babies. But the outlaws had proved themselves square. That was all he asked to know.

"They were on the worst of the trail now. How to handle Cory was a problem. But Vicente solved that. He tied a blanket to two poles, stretcher fashion, then told off four men to carry it. They ran in step, so as to give Cory the impression of a rubber-tired ambulance. It wasn't exactly convincing, but Cory didn't whine. Besides, his baby girl rode in the litter with him. She was just old enough to sit on his chest and pat her hands and consider a blanket litter the greatest lark ever. I dare say she helped pass the time.

"Late the third day Cory got fidgety. He had wound-fever by now. And always, in spite of his

new faith in Vicente, he was harassed by miserable fears. But just at sundown his men halted and lifted him high to see. Straight down the mountain lay Mexia. Little, dirty, forlorn huddle. But I bet you it looked to Cory like the New Jerusalem.

"'So far, señor, can we go with you,' said Vicente, stately and serene. 'I dare not ask my men to ride farther. Even now we are spied upon.' (That was no lie. Cory learned, later, that Mexia was now in Carranzista hands, and that a net of Carranza men lay all about, ready to scoop in Zap bands at every chance.)

"'Your carriers will go with you into the city. They, you will protect and claim your own. I and my army will not see you again, señor. But we will not forget. You, who have fed our children and buried our dead—you shall be ever a prince in our thoughts.'

"There was a lot more large, windy talk like that. A Mexican has to blow, you know. Ornateness is a racial quality. Yes, it was droll, coming from that ignorant little scrub of a half-breed. But it wasn't droll to Cory. He can't talk about it yet, without choking all up. And the ring the kid gave him will go down to Corys to come, along with great-granddaddy Ethan's musket and powder-horn. The funny part about that ring was that it was loot, no doubt about that. A sacerdotal ring, a rather coarse native emerald in a flamboyant red-gold setting. Very like, the kid

had grabbed it in a raid. Or bought it for a peso at a thieves' market. But it's the real thing in Cory's eyes. 'The pledge of a race,' he calls it.

"Well! They went on down the mountain, Cory in his litter, like a bunged-up Cleopatra, and Mrs. Cory on her white mule, and the kids and Patty up on their toes with excitement. At nightfall they reached Mexia. The news of their coming went through the town like wildfire. There were just eight Americans left in Mexia. Maybe they didn't throw their city wide open to the Corys! As luck would have it, there was a good native doctor. He had Cory out of his torture in no time. Though Cory said afterward that neither white bed nor chloroform looked half so good as the glimpse of the big barred gates under his window. Those gates spelled sleep.

"Sleep, Cory did. When he woke up, fourteen hours later, he poured out his tale to the American crowd and begged them to rush aid to his boy preserver. They started some grub up to San Angelo, pronto. But no use trying to find Vicente. The kid and his army had melted back into the mountains. Cory never saw them again.

"But Cory didn't calm down. Not by a long shot. Right through his convalescence, and ever since, he's been the loudest little yipper for intervention, ever. Talks it days, nights, and Sundays."

"Intervention?"

"Intervention, yes. But not the kind you're

thinking of. He wants us to roll up our sleeves, and dig down deep into our bank-accounts, and send an army of reconstruction into Mexico. An army of doctors and nurses and sanitation experts; a squadron loaded to its gun-deck ports with flour and beans and blankets and tools and machinery. He says we can rebuild Mexico for her people as easily as we built the Panama Canal. Easier.

"'Only trouble with us Americans, we've got no spiritual imagination,' says Cory, earnest and aglow. 'Take any of our great movements for social betterment. They're bully, as far as they go. But why can't we carry them farther? Why must a geographical boundary halt us? Look at the Y. M. C. A. and the splendid work it does for our own boys, for Jimmy, and Mike, and Heinrich. Why not for Luis, and Juan, and Pedro? Push it along! And the big-brother movement. Why can't a nation be a big brother to a weaker nation? Man, can't you see the grandeur of this opportunity? Isn't it the noblest job one country could tackle, to drag another country out of the pit?"

"'But the practical difficulties——'

"'Practical tommy-rot. Easiest thing you know. Establish a Mexican loan, a whaling big one, with nominal interest, or none. Send down a regiment of trained social workers, men and women who know how to handle poverty and sickness and crime.

For a campaign like this will call for consecrated lives, as well as blankets and grub and shoes. Ask Latin-America to co-operate with us in sending our army of mercy——'

"'But such a campaign would cost a barrel of money.'

"'Cost money? You're *whistlin'* it'll cost money! And haven't we got the money? Is there another nation on earth that's got as much to spend? Can't we afford to buy bread for those that starve at our gates?'

"'But Mexico is in hard luck because her own people have acted so lawlessly——'

"'Oh, gosh all hemlocks!' wailed Cory, and he got up and began to pace the floor and tear his hair. 'You cold-blooded shark, you swivel-eyed, skinflint son of Belial! If you saw a nine-year-old boy tumble into the ocean, would you stop to ask whether his kid brother had shoved him in? Not much. You'd kick off your shoes and dive straight after him. That's what's up to us. The Mexican people are children, I tell you. Just children. Stupid children, lazy children, thieving children. But, first and last, they're nothing but kids. Hungry kids at that. And in so far as they are hungry, and we can feed them, aren't they our own children to care for? Answer me that!'

"Well, it sounds like a pipe dream. Like Don Quixote in his best vein. Like a wild-goose chase, and then some. Yet, supposing we did lay our

Mexican course a bit off the line of threat and retaliation. Come to think of it, would an expedition of nurses and doctors and food-cars, sent to the sick and famished, look much more foolish than all the 'punitive expeditions' that ever toiled, sweating and swearing, over the border?

"Some time since, there was a two-fisted gentleman named Oliver Cromwell, who compiled a little manual for his troops entitled 'The Souldiers' Pocket Bible.' I held a copy in my hands not a month ago. A little, torn, yellow wad of parchment, tied into a strip of cowhide. It opened of itself to a certain passage. I reckon one of Cromwell's troopers had thumbed that passage more than once.

"'Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bonds of wickedness, to let the oppressed go free? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry? And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine own house?'

"Isaiah said it first. Then Oliver Cromwell, dour old bullet-head, took it for his watchword. Can our own nation choose a nobler watchword today? And when you think back, a hundred and forty years or so, to the days when the foundations were laid for our republic—laid four-square, in justice, in rectitude, in loyalty, in brotherhood to all men—can we in honor refuse to take that watchword for our own?"

His level voice stopped. His keen eyes stared

out past the steep green of the terraces, away to the dazzling turquoise of the sea. And from the path below us boomed, trumpet-tongued, the voice of him of Diaz' little day.

"Yep. Blot 'em out, the worthless rabble they are. Clean 'em up. Sweep 'em off the face of the earth. It's destiny, I tell you. And destiny is always cruel. And always just."

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